

AND AS FOR KISSING THOSE GIRLS,  
well, they were there and wanted to be kissed  
so I obliged them.  
Most girls like being kissed  
and I'll kiss all the pretty girls I can  
because to the city girls down here it doesn't mean a thing.  
I hope this doesn't make you angry,  
but who am I to refuse to kiss a girl  
when she wants me to kiss her?  
Sweet Heart, I don't want to make a big thing of this,  
so in future I won't give any of them the opportunity  
to make you jealous.  
I'll keep true to you if you want it that way.  
Tuck your chin in and smile.  
No more tears.  
Smile and say everything's okay again  
and we'll forget all the unhappy things  
and remember only the happy ones and start afresh.  
Will you do that, Dear?  
Tell me in your next letter.

*NED, 11 March 1940*



Above: Ned Flewell-Smith.  
[Ned, NF1, 1940]





To Mr. Hewell-Smith.  
 A.X. 3199. "Dear Guy."  
 2/15 Br. 7 Dec. A.I.F.  
 14 d. Nov. 1940

To Dawn. With Love.

Lots of Love & Kisses

From your ever loving Darling  
 Ned.



Fear no more the lightning-flash,  
Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;  
Fear not slander, censure rash;  
Thou hast finished joy and moan;  
All lovers young, all lovers must  
Consign to thee, and come to dust.

SHAKESPEARE

**Right:** A Soldier Boy comes to dust.  
The Macrossan smash, Burdekin River Bridge,  
~ 5.30 p.m. Thursday, 16 September 1948.  
This photo was taken the following day.

[Dawn, DF38]









To Dawn, From your ever loving  
Soldier Bay. Ned.

P.S. Darling, this is about the shortest letter I've ever  
written to you, & I'm sorry I can't write any more, but  
there's nothing to write about except how much I  
love you. Sweet heart, you believe when I say  
that, Don't you, Darling. Because it's true.  
Darling, I'll remember you. I'll see you again.  
Sweet heart. I'll remember you. I'll see you again.  
lots of love & kisses to the  
Sweetest girl in all the world.  
From yours truly,  
Ned.

x x x x x  
x x x x x

**Above:** An example of Ned's letter writing:  
a postscript to Dawn written from Darwin,  
29 September 1940.

Printed on a Xerox iGen3, November 2009,  
on Saxton Chardonnay 140 GSM paper  
in a limited edition of less than 10 copies.

For details how to purchase a copy of this book,  
or to download a free PDF version, visit  
<http://sites.google.com/site/tanksinker>.

Guy Burns asserts his rights to be identified as the author.

# COME TO DUST

A Work in Three Parts

Book Two

## Bad Penny

The wartime love letters of Ned Flewell-Smith

Book One

*Tank Sinker!*

The Story of Max Burns & Julia Creek

Book Three

*Tuppence For Tuppence*

The story of Jill Burns and her betrayal



WILLIAM WEIR FLEWELL-SMITH ♥ LOU

- ↪ Douglas
- ↪ Stanley
- ↪ Alan
- ↪ Keith
- ↪ Marj ♥ 1932 Max Burns
  - ↪ Joy
  - ↪ Don ♥ 1957 Jill Brennan
    - ↪ Guy (author)
    - ↪ Kal
  - ↪ Barry
  - ↪ Mal
  - ↪ Butch
- ↪ Clive (died POW, Ambon, 9 June 1945)
- ↪ Ned ♥ 1943 Dawn Lewis
  - ↪ Deric
  - ↪ Clive

ROBERT LINDSAY BURNS ♥ JANE

- ↪ Norma
- ↪ Max ♥ 1932 Marj Flewell-Smith
- ↪ Bob
- ↪ Bill
- ↪ George (KIA, Bardia, 3 January 1941)

# Preamble



THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT on 15 September 1939, soon after it had declared war on Germany, announced the formation of a division of 20,000 men for service in Australia or overseas, the 6th Division, the first division formed in the 2nd AIF (Australian Imperial Force). The previous five divisions had served in the first war. The men of the 6th Division sailed for the Middle East in January 1940.

In February the 7th Division was formed and it followed the 6th to the Middle East in December 1940. This book tells the story of one of the men who enlisted in the 7th Division: Ned Flewell-Smith, my great uncle. He was in No. 1 section of 16 Platoon, 'D' Company, 2/15th Battalion, 20th Brigade, 7th Division of the 2nd AIF.

Ned's battalion was transferred to the 9th Division in February 1941 when the AIF was reorganised.

## Second AIF

Began in September 1939  
with the forming of the 6th Division.

Commanded by a General.  
Consisted of four divisions: 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th.

## 7th Division

10,000 – 20,000 men. Commanded by a Major General.  
Consisted of three brigades: 19th, 20th, 21st.

## 20th Brigade

2500 – 5000 men. Commanded by a Brigadier General.  
Consisted of three battalions: 2/13th, 2/15th, 2/17th.

## 2/15th Battalion

550 – 1000 men. Commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel.  
Consisted of four companies: A, B, C, D.

## 'D' Company

100 – 225 men. Commanded by a Captain or Major.  
Consisted of three platoons: 16, 17, 18.

## 16 Platoon

30 – 60 men. Commanded by a Lieutenant.  
Consisted of three sections.

## No. 1 Section

9 – 16 men. Commanded by a Corporal or Sergeant.





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NED WAS eight years younger than me. I can remember him as a small boy – he was everybody's darling. He was the youngest, y'see. There were all my older brothers first, and then me, Clive, and Ned.

Ned's not his given name. He was christened Edgar John, but we called him Ned after the leader of the Kelly gang because it didn't matter what you said to him he was always up in arms, always on the defensive. Just one of those sort of kids. He was a funny little bloke.

Then when he grew up... he was a bonzer kid really. He was still so young when he left home that we never knew him as a man. Not really, y'know. And before we knew it, he and Clive went to war.

Ned worked for Max a few times before he joined up. He was a good kid around the farm. He was my baby brother so I looked after him when he came to work for us at Biloela. But he never stayed a long time. He used to get seasonal work.

I wrote to him during the war and he wrote to me. I kept the letters for a long time, but they're gone now.

After the war he went tanksinking with Max for a few months. Dawn didn't like the tanksinking life cos we were right out in the back blocks of Western Queensland and she wasn't very fond of the back blocks. So they left and went into Charters Towers.

It was a real tragedy when Ned was killed.

MARJ BURNS  
(married Max Burns)

**Left:** Some of Ned's family enjoying a picnic at Ficks Crossing, Barambah Creek, near Wondai. From left: unidentified girl, Clive, Marj, Ned, Lou and William (Ned's parents).

*[Guy Burns, GB38, November 1930]*





# We Became Good Pals

On a farm near Mulgildie, girl meets boy...  
but Bad Penny goes for a soldier

## Dawn Flewell-Smith



I WAS BORN AT BOONAH on 5 August 1922. Mum and Dad were married at Murgon and then Dad selected a property near Monto in 1923. We were nearer to Mulgildie<sup>1</sup> than Monto. About 700 acres: wheat, lucerne, milo, dairy cattle, cream. We grew cotton and corn and pumpkins. Then they brought in all these boards – you had to go through the Egg Board, the Potato Board. Got that way you couldn't sell things. If they caught Dad selling a bag of potatoes directly to someone and not via the board he'd have been in trouble.

I used to help Dad make fences. We'd dig a hole and put the post in; do about three or four like that. We'd have them drilled, ready for the barbed wire. He'd have a coil of barbed wire around a crowbar in the ground, and then Dad would hitch old Nigger, the quietest of the draught horses, on to the wire and pull it through the posts. And I used to help Dad on the cross-cut saw, sawing down trees and splitting them. I liked doing those things better than being in the house.

When I was about 12 Dad went with Evelyn. She was on the property next door and Dad got friendly with her. I don't know why Mum didn't just stay on the farm and put up a fight; stand her ground. But she didn't, and my parents got divorced.

The divorce affected me at school. In my heart I was always conscious of being *that Lewis girl*. Always. That's what I felt.

Dad had to go to court to get legal custody of my sister Jean and I. Mum didn't get custody because she couldn't prove that she could support us. She was working on the property next door to Dad's, for people called Ball. She had us for the first six months; that was part of the deal. Then when the six months were up we had to go back to Dad. She walked down the lane with us and when we got to Dad's boundary she said that was as far as she could go. So we walked the rest of the way ourselves, crying our eyes out. It wasn't easy when we moved back with Dad because I was only five years younger than Evelyn.

We were still living in the old house, but it wasn't long before Dad picked a place for a new one. A travelling sawmill came by and they sawed the gums for timber. That's when Dad built the new house for Evelyn – a new house for a new wife.

I didn't get looked after like a mother would look after a daughter. When I was growing up and developing, I remember Dad saying to Evelyn (she was going to town): "When you get to town, buy that girl a bra".

1. The modern spelling is Mulgildie, but Ned spelt it Mulgeldie on his envelopes and in his letters. The township is 7 miles south of Monto, itself 75 miles due west of Bundaberg in the catchment of the upper Burnett River.



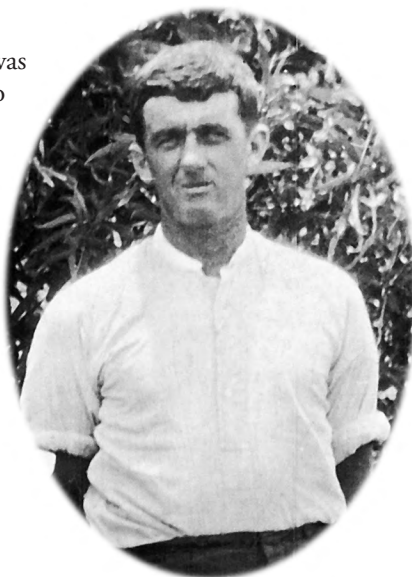
**Above:** Dawn, aged about 18.  
[Dawn, DF62, ca 1940]

**Opposite:** Jean (left, Dawn's only sibling), Dawn, and their mother Maggie, at the back of the old house.  
[Dawn, DF69, ca 1933]



Mum always kept in touch. We knew where she was and we leaned Mum's way a bit. I'd go on my bike to see her at whichever farm she was working on. She was helping out, y'see. Mum went and helped out on two or three different farms.

I was ready to sit for scholarship one year to get into high school, but Dad wouldn't let me go on with school after primary. I started work on the farm instead. Mr Fisher, the headmaster, came over on his bike and asked Dad to let me go on because I was clever at school. I used to take the little ones out onto the verandah. The teacher asked me to teach them. I was good at school and I had a memory. Dad should have let me go on to get my certificate.



**Top:** Dawn's father, Cyril Lewis.  
[Dawn, DF26, 1926]

**Opposite:** Ned in uniform.  
[Joy Burns, J49, 1940]

**Bottom left:** Dawn on her Dad's farm with her bicycle.  
[Dawn, DF39, 1938]

"That was my bike, but it was a man's bike. It was all I ever had. I was supposed to pick cotton to pay for it. I was about 15 or 16. I used to pedal it over to visit Mum on the other property after she left. And I used to go in of a Sunday to Mulgildie, about 6 miles, to see if there was any mail from Ned."

**Bottom right:** "I was good at school and I had a memory."  
Dawn at Bald Hills School at Selene, about 4 miles from Mulgildie.  
[Dawn, DF48, 1928]



I WAS WORKING AT HOME on Dad's farm when I met Ned. It was just before the war started. Dad used to get men up from the employment place in Brisbane. He used to always have a couple of men working for him. He got a telegram from the employment people to say Ned Smith will be on such-n-such a train. Ned turned up and said his name was Ned Smith. It wasn't until a fortnight or more later that we found out he was a Flewell-Smith. Dad mentioned that he'd worked on the roads at Murgon with a Doug Flewell-Smith and Ned said: "Yeah, he's my eldest brother".

Ned had a blazer on the first time I saw him. I used to look out the window to see what the blokes were like when they first arrived. Dad would go and meet the train and I'd wait by the window to watch the bloke get out of the truck and open the gate. This time it was Ned and he was wearing a striped jacket, a blazer. He made a good first impression. And he was the first man, of all the men that Dad had employed, that I was introduced to as Dad's daughter. I suppose I was getting older. Ned would have been 19 and I would have been 17, and he was the first fellow I was ever really attached to.

Ned had a room in the house. The previous men used to eat with us, but they slept over in the old house. In the new house, the one Dad built for Evelyn, I don't think he allowed any other worker to stay except Ned.

Ned and I, we became good pals, but he left the farm after only a few months. I think he left because Dad was a bit touchy about Ned and I being together. I don't really remember what happened, except that Ned felt that he'd be more comfortable away from the farm.

He joined the militia a few months later, in January 1940, and then he joined the AIF.

It was during one of his visits to the farm while on leave that Ned told me he didn't like the name Mabel, so we picked a name we both liked. Dawn's what I got – but only between ourselves. When I got older I went and made it legal.









# Introduction



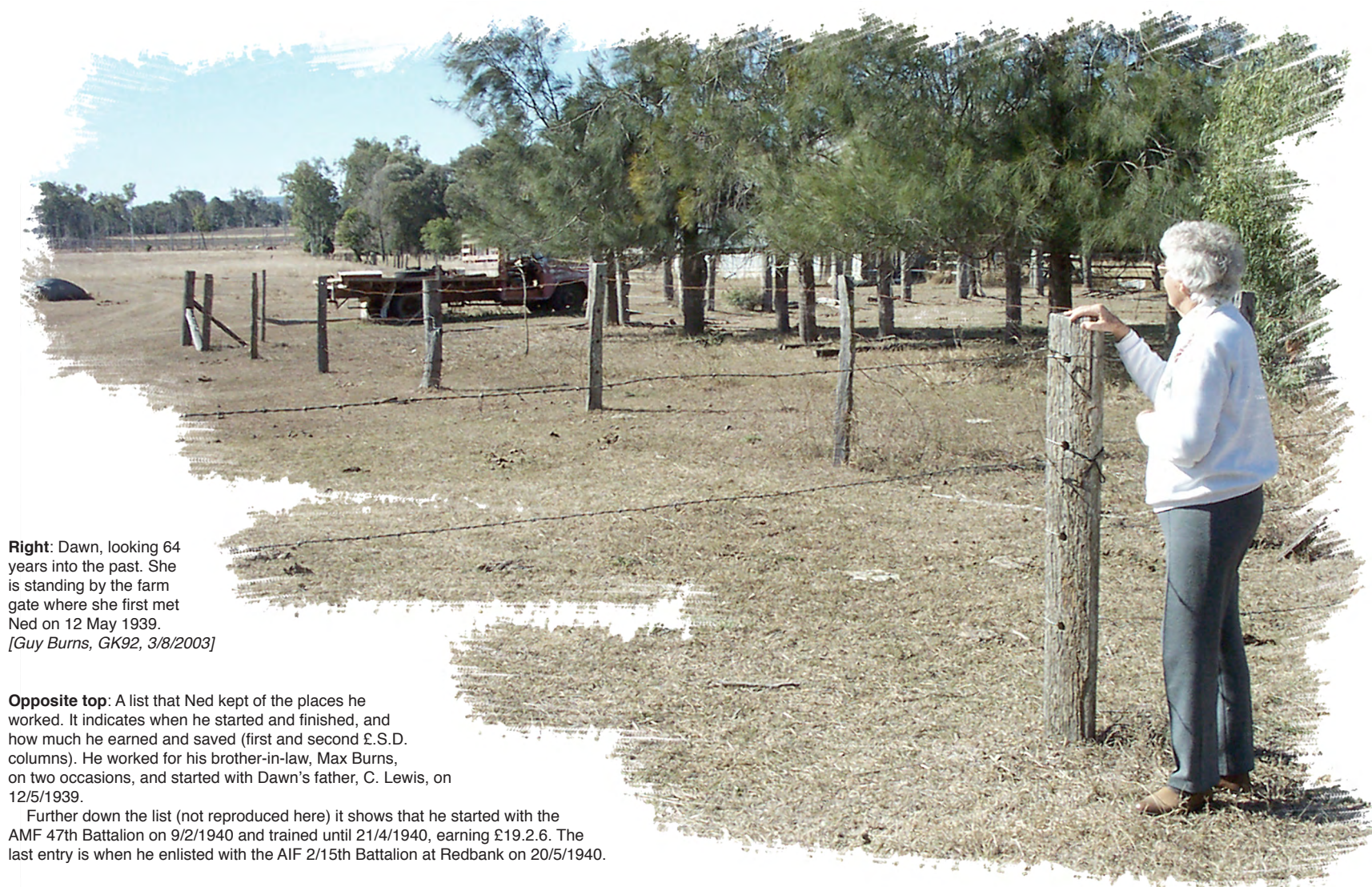
I FIRST MET DAWN FLEWELL-SMITH in 2002 while researching stories about my grandfather, Max Burns. Dawn had been married to one of my grandmother's brothers, so we are distantly related by marriage. Her name had been mentioned by other family members in connection with the Commercial Hotel in Charters Towers, which my grandfather had owned for about a year starting in November 1947. Dawn was licensee of the hotel for the first few months and that was the reason I wanted to talk to her.

We met at her home in Coolumb, a beachside town north of Brisbane, and we became acquainted amongst the jumble of a lifetime's accumulation of objects scattered all over the house and being sorted in preparation for the move to Monto, close to her childhood years, where she wanted to return before she died.

Dawn doesn't throw much out (for that personal quirk I'm very thankful), and because of her bowerbird nature the house was a littered mess of what turned out to be 42 tea-chests worth of possessions. I know the number because I stayed for several days and helped her pack. And in amongst all the dross was the most significant find of documents and photos that I came across in four years of research.

Dawn had met Ned at the front gate of her father's farm on the 12th of May 1939. The exact date can be identified because Ned kept a detailed log of all the places he worked after he left home (see opposite), and the log reveals that he started with Cyril Lewis (Dawn's father) on that date and stayed for a little over three months. By the time of their parting, Dawn and Ned had become soul mates.

I remember sitting in the front section of Dawn's small home, someone's holiday cottage from many years before, with barely enough room on the table for the increasing number of items that Dawn wanted to show me, when she pointed to a battered port near a pile of memorabilia and asked me would I bring it over. It might have been a school port in better days, but now the locks didn't work and it was held closed by a leather belt. She undid the buckle and scrummaged around inside. As she touched the precious envelopes, and opened one or two and started reading, she said: "These were from Ned". That was all she said. I lost her for several minutes while she slipped back to the 1940s and rekindled the love of her youth. It was obvious to me this was not an uncommon ritual for Dawn: to go to her port, her Tardis, and be transported back to her first passionate feelings of love for a man, and always to return moist-eyed.



**Right:** Dawn, looking 64 years into the past. She is standing by the farm gate where she first met Ned on 12 May 1939.  
[Guy Burns, GK92, 3/8/2003]

**Opposite top:** A list that Ned kept of the places he worked. It indicates when he started and finished, and how much he earned and saved (first and second £.S.D. columns). He worked for his brother-in-law, Max Burns, on two occasions, and started with Dawn's father, C. Lewis, on 12/5/1939.

Further down the list (not reproduced here) it shows that he started with the AMF 47th Battalion on 9/2/1940 and trained until 21/4/1940, earning £19.2.6. The last entry is when he enlisted with the AIF 2/15th Battalion at Redbank on 20/5/1940.



Then she let me touch and read the letters. Well, some of the letters, for inside the port was most of Ned's correspondence to Dawn during his war service – several hundred letters still encased in their original envelopes. But there was more. Ned was a keen photographer and had a camera with him all the time he was in the army. He put the photos in an album as a permanent record of his service, and it was this album that Dawn next showed me. Flicking through the pages I recognized some of the place names, and as I did so I remembered hearing that one of my relatives had been a Rat of Tobruk. And there I sat, cradling a Tobruk Rat's photos just as he'd prepared them almost 60 years ago. Usually photo albums suffer loss as the years progress, as relatives want this photo or that, and blank spaces spread; but not with this album. Dawn would not allow it to be desecrated and I was seeing it as Ned left it.

I was surprised by the images I saw. I knew of the strict censorship that letters were subjected to during wartime, and I had assumed that such censorship would have also applied to photographs and cameras. I was taken aback to see a photo of Ned's foxhole during the siege of Tobruk. Didn't Ned have more important concerns (for instance, being shot by a German while standing out in the open) than photographing a hole in the ground? Obviously not, for here were photographs of most aspects of his service other than when in direct military action.

Not all the photographs were taken by Ned (some of them have appeared in other books), but I suspect the majority are Ned originals.

DAWN WAS NOT SHY about sharing the contents of the letters with me, despite their often intimate content, and she agreed to let me copy the letters and the photos in preparation for turning them into a book. So, upon clearing enough table-top space for my laptop and enough floor space for my scanner, I copied all the photos, all the letters, and most of the envelopes (some of the envelopes, I think, have historical interest).

I provide the reader with only a smidgin of background information about the war aspects of this story – the different battles, who was fighting who, and when – as that information can be gleaned from numerous other books. Within these pages, uncluttered by a plethora of military events, is the intimate correspondence between a Soldier Boy and a country girl, newly in love but separated by war. The only difference between this story and thousands of other similar stories, is that the whole of Ned's correspondence has been preserved, together with photos, and Dawn has allowed me to put them into book form.

GUY BURNS  
October 2008

(Ned)  
Edgar. John. Hewell-Smith.  
Ramon. Keith. De Long.

Left Home 8<sup>th</sup> July 1937 Age 17 yrs 30 days

Name	Place	Start	Board	Finish	L.S.D.	L.S.D.	How
	Bld.				10.	10.	
A.M. Rae.	Mirani	12.7.37	B.1.	12.1.38	81.5.	43.7.6	F.
J.H. Hobson	Kinna	1.2.38	K.	22.2.38	3.	3.	L.
E.B. Pichels	Brigooda	4.3.38	K.	20.6.38	15.10.	15.10.	L.
M.D. Burns	Bilacla	26.6.38	K.	15.8.38	6.15.	6.15.	L.
R. Kelly	Inia Inia	9.8.38	B.1.	1.9.38	16.5.10	11.15.10	F.
J.F. Walz	Mirani	2.9.38	B.0.	8.9.38	4.14.4	4.10.8	F.
M.R.C.	Netherdale	13.9.38	B.0.	6.12.38	52.19.8	46.5.4	F.
C. Holdsworth	Brigooda	19.12.38	K.	23.12.38	15.	15.	L.
M.D. Burns	Bilacla	24.12.38	K.	26.4.39	25.10.	25.10.	L.
C. Lewis	Mulgildie	12.5.39	K.	25.8.39	22.10.	22.10.	L.
C. Holdsworth	Brigooda	29.8.39	K.	10.10.39	12.	12.	F.

I long to clasp thy kindly hand  
your loving face to see  
Hope whispers you will soon come back  
till then remember me  
round is the ring that has no end  
so is my love for you my friend  
if hands and hearts were brought together  
your love might fail  
but mine will never

M. Lewis  
6/11/39

I long to clasp thy kindly hand  
your loving face to see  
Hope whispers you will soon come back  
till then remember me.

Round is the ring that has no end  
so is the love for you my friend  
if hands and hearts were brought together  
Your love might fail  
but mine will never.

**Above:** The dreams of a young woman in love. Dawn's love for Ned did fail, and on more than one occasion, but it was renewed each time. It will last until she is buried beside him in the Mulgildie cemetery.

Note: "M. Lewis" is Mabel Lewis, Dawn's maiden name.



"Letters – they mean something to your heart.  
The writer has touched that paper and sent it to you."

DAWN

C/ Mr C. Holdsworth  
Brigooda  
Via Preston  
30.8.39

My Dearest Sweetheart  
are you feeling now I hope you a better, do  
you miss me much. I bet you don't, not as  
much as I miss you, anyway. I have just comp  
my first days work here and I am tired. its the  
hard work I've done for about six months. I su  
you know I came over here by plane. I had  
wait six hours in Monto on Monday before  
plane was ready to leave. It just took sixty  
minutes to go from Monto to Murgan. All left  
in the afternoon. Well, precious  
you a present from me I h  
I didn't write a note  
the time



# Letters 1939



**Above:** The envelope in which Ned sent his first letter to Dawn, postmarked 31 August 1939.

AFTER WORKING for Dawn's father from 12/5/1939 till 25/8/1939, Ned went to work for a Mr Holdsworth at Brigooda. He stayed there about six weeks (see list of places Ned worked, previous page), and while there wrote his first letter to Dawn.

C/- Mr C. Holdsworth  
Brigooda  
Via Preston  
30.8.39

To my Dearest Sweetheart

Well. Sweetheart how

are you feeling now? I hope you are better. Do you miss me much? I'll bet you don't. Not as much as I miss you, anyway.

I have just completed my first day's work here and am I tired. It's the first hard work I've done for about six months. I suppose you know I came over here by plane. I had to wait six hours in Monto on Monday before the plane was ready to leave. It took just 65 minutes to go from Monto to Murgon.

I have only written one page so far – or to be exact, scribbled it, Darling – but if you knew how tired I am you wouldn't expect any more. I can't think of any other news at present. I don't want to close this letter, but I have no option; everyone is going to bed.

So, goodnight my precious Sweet Heart. Look after yourself.

after yourself.  
From your Truly Loving Sweetheart  
Ned  
xxxxxx

There's only one thing I wish for now:  
that I had never joined the army  
and had stayed with you, Sweet Heart.

What would you say if I got out of the army?  
Would you think the same of me or not?  
Because at times I feel very tempted to chuck everything in  
and go back to civvies.  
I could manage to get ejected  
if I told the truth about my leg  
and said that it was giving me trouble,  
but I guess that would be the coward's way out,  
wouldn't it.

Anyway, ten to one if I did do that,  
I'd only last a couple of months and I'd re-enlist.  
I would see some of the troops marching by  
and I'd join up again.  
It gets into your blood.

I guess we say a lot of things  
that we really mean when we are in uniform,  
but if we were ejected from it  
we would envy the uniform chaps,  
after a time,  
and do our best to get back in.

It just gets a hold on you.  
I don't know... it might be pride.

## ***Letters 1940***





**Left top:** Ned at Toogoolawah.  
[Ned, NF10, Christmas 1939]



**Left bottom:** To Mabel with best wishes and love, from Ned.  
From left: Gloria Houritz (sister of Ned's best friend, Don Houritz), Ned, and Don Houritz's girlfriend.  
[Dawn, DF46, 1940]

DC Flewell-Smith. <sup>(1)</sup>  
Alondair  
Kingeroy Line  
1st Jan. 1940

Dearest Mabel

I recieved your welcome letter

a fair while ago now. I hope you will excuse me for not writing to you sooner than this<sup>2</sup>, but I just couldn't bring myself to write letters to anyone, though receiving letters from you is about the only pleasant thing I have got to look forward to now.

Well, Mabel, in your letter you say that Christmas is nearly here. And now it's gone for another year. I hope you had a happy one. Every time I think of what we planned to do this Christmas I get so much down in the dumps about it that I feel as if I've lost something inside of me.

I went for a trip with a friend of mine by car down to Brisbane and Redcliffe, also Ipswich and Toogoolawah. We spent Christmas Day at Toogoolawah. All told we had a pretty good time.

I might be going for three months training soon. I hope you haven't been offended (at my taking such a long time to answer your last letter) and refuse to write to me. I'd rather lose a finger than have you stop writing to me. Please keep writing, eh.

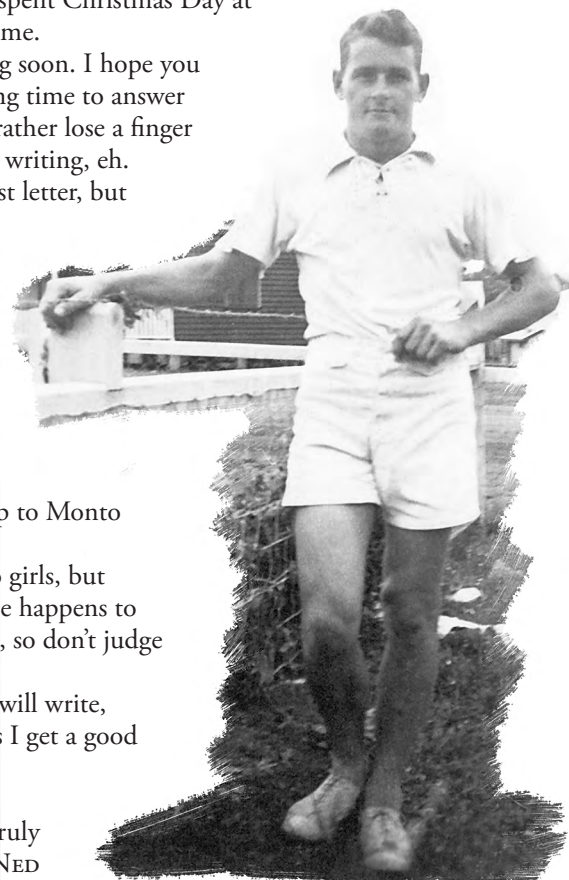
I haven't done any more work since my last letter, but I hope to get a couple of weeks' work with one of my brothers driving the tractor for a sawmill.

I suppose you will think me impertinent to ask if you and Hardy have done what I wanted you and I to do. Have you? If you ever feel like dumping Hardy and picking up with me again, let me know, won't you? Because if I go away for military training it's very likely I'll come up to Monto when we finish up.

I think I'll send you a snap of me and two girls, but don't think I'm going with either of them. One happens to be my best friend's sister and the other his girl, so don't judge by the looks of things.

Well, Mabel, I think I'll close. You please will write, won't you? I'll send a snap of myself as soon as I get a good one. Excuse the lead pencil.

I remain yours truly  
NED



1. DC Flewell-Smith is Ned's brother, Doug.  
2. Ned wrote other letters to Dawn between his first letter (previous page) and this one, but they have not survived.

C/- A. W. Flewell-Smith  
Cloyna, via Murgon  
Friday, 19 January 1940

DEAREST MABEL – I received your letter yesterday and for once I am complying with your wishes by writing straight away. I must say your letter was most welcome and I was very pleased to get it. You will see by the above address where to write to me next time. I'm helping my brother Alan cut some timber for a couple of houses out this way till I go away to camp. I told you in my last letter I might be going. Well, it's a fact now – I've joined the militia<sup>1</sup>. I think we leave on the 9th February, so I'm afraid I won't see you for three months unless you come down to Brisbane while we are training. I wish you could.

I nearly was rejected as physically unfit because of that operation on my leg. The doc said it mightn't stand up to the marching. Otherwise, everything is okay.

There is a ball in Wondai tonight to give us a farewell. The boys wanted me to go in, but I don't think I will as it's 26 miles and I would have to borrow a car and go by myself.

I'm glad you broke it off with Hardy. You ask what would be my answer if you wanted to come back to me – I'd say okay. But I couldn't do anything till I

come back from camp (that is, about seeing you or getting a job up there) but otherwise I wish you would come back.

That photo of yours<sup>2</sup> – you want to know what I think of it? Well, it's not a good one of you by any means. Go and get someone to take another one of you and send it on. I have one of myself, by myself, but it's not developed yet. I can't afford to. If it's any good I'll send it to you.

Hurry up and answer this letter. Don't make me wait like I made you wait, for I want to hear from you before I go to camp. I'll send my camp address in my next letter as we still don't know exactly where we are going.

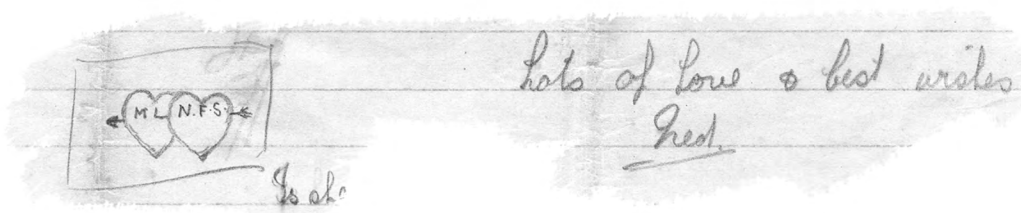
Give my regards to your mother and father and Evelyn. And by the way, I bet your father said what a lazy, good for nothing young loafer I was, and not what you reckoned he said about me.

Well, Dearest, I have to sign off, it's getting late. You will have to excuse the rotten writing, but I'm lying in bed writing this. I'd like to write a lot more but I'm that tired I'm seeing two lines instead of one now. Well, so long.



1. From 1930-39 the military was called the AMF (Australian Military Forces), known unofficially as the Australian *Militia* Forces, hence Ned's use of the word "militia".

2. Ned is probably referring to the photo of Dawn on p28.



**Opposite right:** Hardy Slaughter. "If your ever feel like dumping Hardy and picking up with me again, let me know, won't you?" (Ned)

"Hardy was boarding at the boarding house in Monto where I was working. Him and I went to the pictures a couple of times." (Dawn)

[Ned, NF78, ca 1940]



**Above:** Ned with a bandaged leg, the operation Ned refers to in his letter. The leg was infected and some bone was removed when Ned was 10.  
[Dawn, DF84, Dec 1930]

**Below:** Timber-getting for houses that Ned's brother, Alan, was building in Cloyna. Ned worked for Alan from 14/1/1940 till 8/2/1940, his last job before joining the AMF. The men are unidentified.  
[Ned, NF23, NF25, Jan 1940]





## *Camp's a great place to be*

*Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'B' Coy, 47 Bn  
Fraser's Paddock<sup>1</sup>, Enoggera  
Friday, 16 February 1940*

DEAREST MABEL – I haven't heard from you for quite a while and I have been wondering what's happened to you as you very seldom lose much time in answering. You're not, by any chance, wild because I joined up with the militia are you?

Camp's a great place to be. We are having a pretty good time so far. I have been down here just a week now and we have had three concerts at camp and I have been into the city twice. They look after us pretty well: good tucker, the concerts are free, and lots of other things are too. The boys hold boxing tournaments amongst themselves, but I haven't tried my hand yet and I don't think I will – though they want me to have a smack at someone in the 15th Battalion.

Well, Mabel, I think that's all for the time being. Excuse the scribble and everything else as there's not a pen in our hut and I'm lying on the floor writing this.

I hope you are well. Don't forget to write and let me know how you are. I hope I get a letter from you before you get this. Here's hoping anyway.

*I remain  
your ex-Sweet Heart  
NED*

*Reg No. A551698  
'B' Coy, 47 Bn  
Fraser's Paddock, Enoggera  
Sunday, 3 March 1940*

DEAREST MABEL – Your welcome letter I received a couple of days ago was a surprise – a pleasant one though. I didn't expect a letter from you when I didn't get an answer to my last one. Please don't frighten me like that again.

This is the second letter I've attempted to write to you. I started one the other night, but all the boys were confined to camp. Matter of fact, the whole 47th Battalion was confined to camp as some money was missing. Anyway, four detectives came out from town and put the wind up whoever took it and he threw it back into the hut that night.

But to get back to the subject of the first letter. Twenty-three boys, that's the number what camps in our hut. Just imagine 23 men in a 40' x 15' hut, with one half staging an impromptu concert one end, and the rest acting the goat and wrestling at the other. They got into a bit of a scrap near me and it ended in a dog fight – with me in the middle. When a bit of order had been restored in the hut, the writing pad was wrecked and the letter was in four different pieces. So failed the first attempt. I've got hopes of finishing this tonight as most of the boys are on guard, and I'm on picquet<sup>2</sup> myself – and in a hurry – so excuse the scribble. I'm always wanting you to excuse something, aren't I.

I've still got the old complaint – I can't think of you and write of news down here at the same time, but I'll try. I went on a boat trip on the bay last Sunday night. Had a good time, but there were no girls. I have only kissed one or two girls down here so far, Sweet, so you are wrong in your guessing.

Dearest, I know you don't want me to join up for overseas but I'm afraid I'm going to. There isn't anything else for me to do. I've done my best to get a good job, but I guess I'm a failure in that respect.

I'm glad you didn't give in to Jim. Also, I'm glad in a way you didn't give in to me. I must have worried you a hell of a lot. I'm sorry.

Well, my Sweet, I'll say goodnight.

*Pleasant dreams and lots of love  
NED*

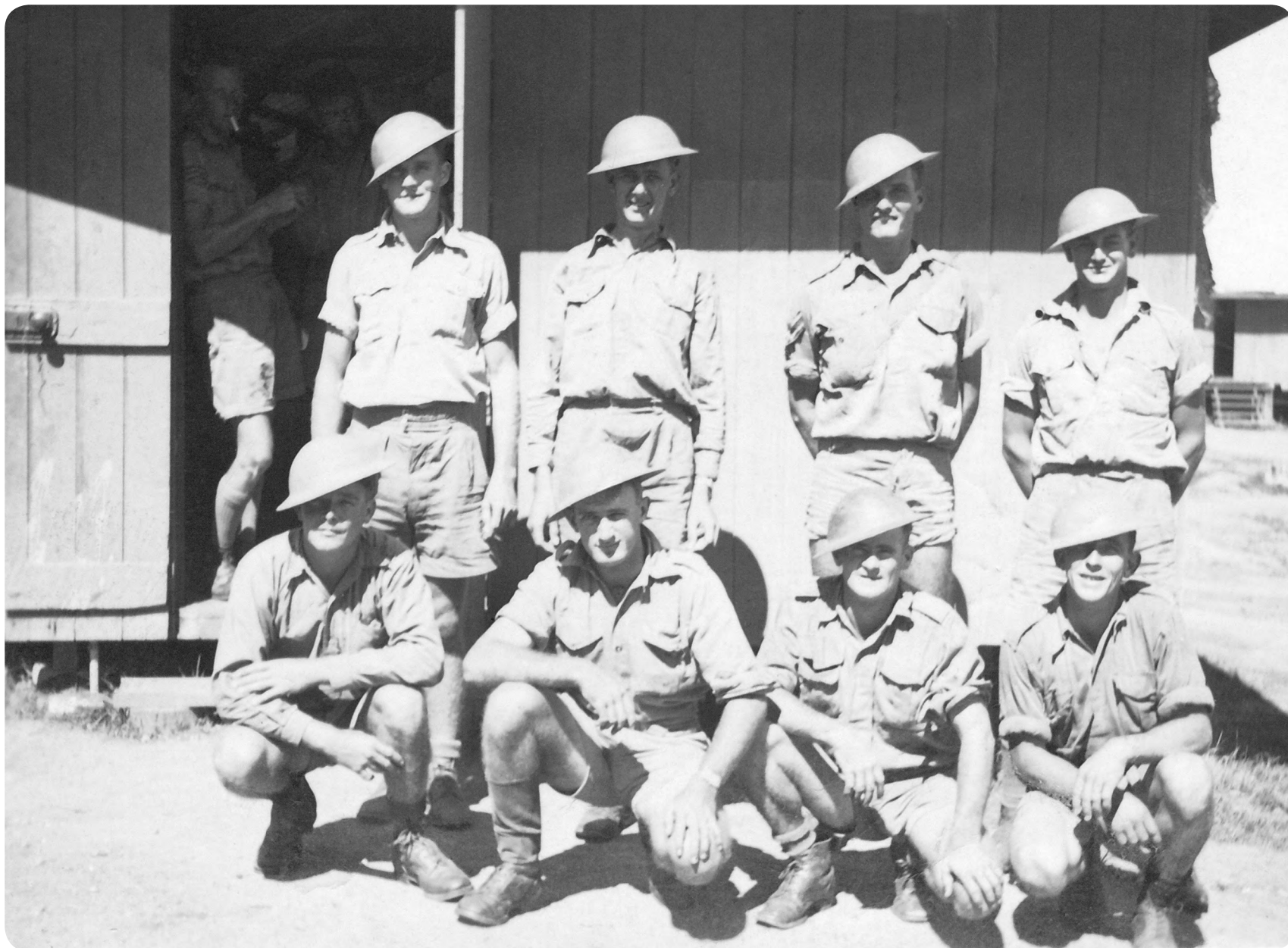
P.S. Could you write a couple of letters a week to me? It's about the most pleasant time we have, receiving letters. As for the photo, I'll send you one as soon as I can afford to get one taken. Well, so long, Dearest. I've got to go on duty now.

*Sweet dreams  
NED*

1. The present day Enoggera Barracks is on land originally called Fraser's Paddock. It was where most Queensland men of the first AIF (World War 1) did their initial training.

2. Picquet (modern spelling: picket) is a British military term dating from around 1700 that refers to soldiers placed forward of a position to warn against an enemy advance. Today it refers to a soldier maintaining a watch. It may mean a watch for the enemy, or other types of watch. For example, in his letter dated 16/8/1940, Ned tells Dawn that he is "on town picquet tomorrow night" (second paragraph, p52).



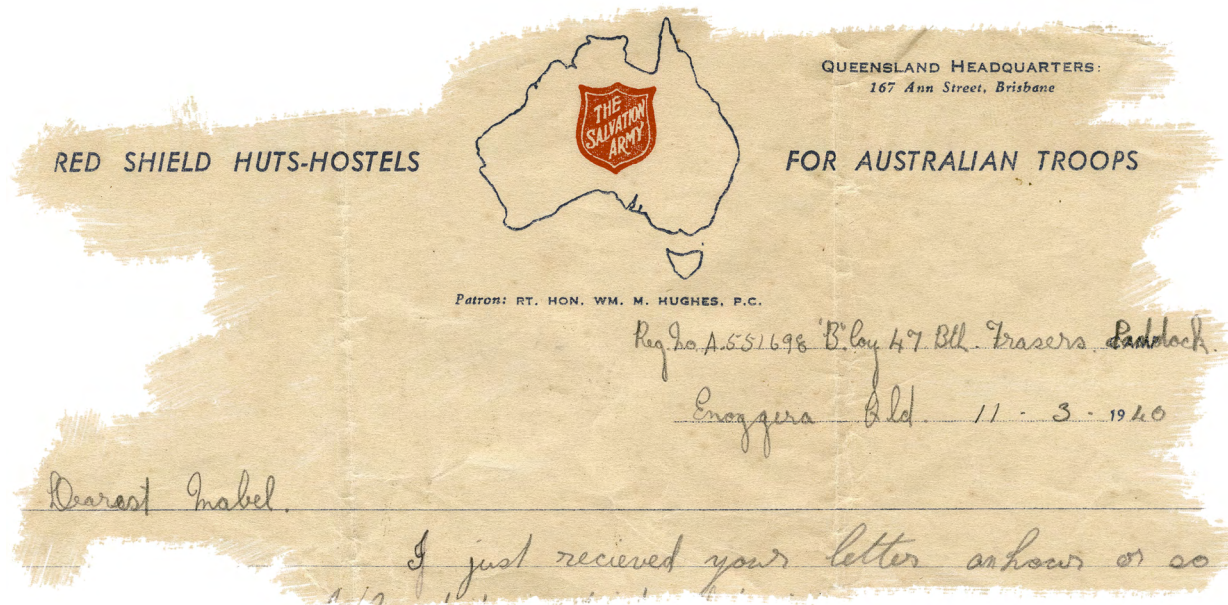


**Above:** Ned (back row, far right) in front of barracks at Frasers Paddock. The signatures of the eight men are on the back of the photo, but it is not known which name belongs to which man. The names are:

McGrory (Cpl, No 9 Section), S.A. Andersen,  
J.H. Considine, F.J. Cross, B.A. Specht,  
S.G. Farrer, V.H. Bock, E.J. Flewell-Smith.

*[Ned, NF17, 1940]*

## *I'll kiss all the pretty girls I can*



ago and was I pleased to get it – that is, in some parts. Others weren't so good. You say that you love me. Well, Dearest, do you think I would keep on writing to you if I didn't love *you*? That's why I didn't return your watch, because if I had, everything would have been finished.

And as for kissing those girls, well, they were there and wanted to be kissed, so I obliged them. Most girls like being kissed and I'll kiss all the pretty girls I can because to the city girls down here it doesn't mean a thing. I hope this doesn't make you angry, but who am I to refuse to kiss a girl when she wants me to kiss her?

Sweet Heart, I don't want to make a big thing of this, so in future I won't give any of them the opportunity to make you jealous. I'll keep true to you if you want it that way. Tuck your chin in and smile. No more tears. Smile and say everything's okay again and we'll forget all the unhappy things and remember only the happy ones and start afresh. Will you do that, Dear? Tell me in your next letter.

Well, Dearest, I'm having a pretty quiet time. I haven't heard from home since I came down here. You are the only one who thinks I'm worth writing to it seems.

I'll have to close now. There was a concert here tonight and it's just finished and the boys are coming in and starting a din again. It's lights out and there's no more news that I can think of.

Oh, by the way, we might get four days' leave at Easter. If I have enough cash – and if you like – I might come up. Tell me in your letter, Darling.

I'll have to close. The boys are growling about the lights. Goodnight, Sweet Heart. Lots of love and kisses.

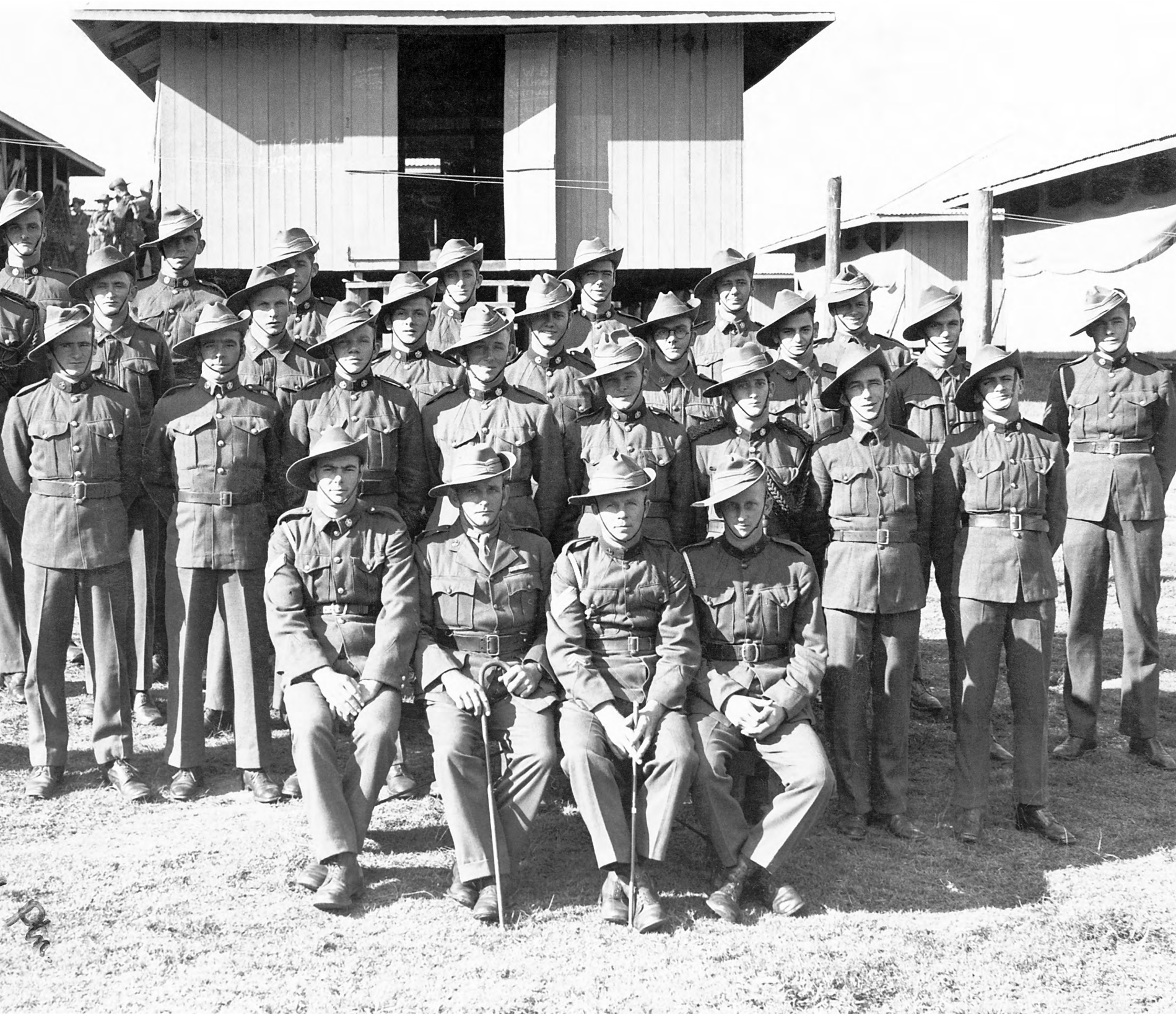
*From NED*

P.S. Dear, I haven't got any snaps in uniform yet, but I'm getting some taken in town and I'll send you some. So long, Dearest, till I write again.

*Love from NED*







**Above:** No. 6 Platoon, 'B' Company, 47th Battalion, AMF.  
Ned is third from right, second row from back.

[Ned, NF08, 1940]



*Reg No. A551698  
'B' Coy, 47 Bn  
Fraser's Paddock, Enoggera  
Sunday, 17 March 1940*

DEAREST MABEL – Thanks for your welcome letter. I didn't expect it, although I know I asked you to write. Keep up the good work, Dearest, and write often.

It's raining down here now; has been the last two days. I suppose it's raining up there too. It's about the miserablest weather since I've been here.

I was on guard the other night: 3½ hours guarding a hut, just walking round it in the drizzling rain. Think of me, Dearest, some night when it's raining and cold, and pray I'm not on duty.

Oh, by the way, I didn't tell you in my last letter that I have sent my papers in for the AIF. Another thing, too, I've got to tell you. I can't come up for Easter even if you had wanted me to, because 26 men in each company have to stay in camp. I might be able to come up another weekend if I can afford it.

Well, Precious, I have to close. I've told you everything I can think of. Goodnight, my dearest Sweet Heart. Precious dreams.

*Lots of love and kisses  
From your ever-loving Darling  
NED*

23.3.1940 – Well, Darling, you have got me at a disadvantage this time. Two letters running and me not having time to answer them right away. I'm sorry, Sweet, to keep you waiting – if only for a day – but I promised Mum I would go out to see her.

We are having a lovely time here in camp by ourselves. There's only 100 out of 700 left, and worse luck we were on guard last night and all day today; 24 hours all told. Anyway, it's got its good points – it helps me to save money and gives me plenty of time to write to you. So it's not too bad, is it.

By the way, my AIF application: I went for a medical examination last Thursday and I passed okay, but there are four more doctors to pass. Nothing's definite, so you can keep on hoping for a while yet. There's talk they are going to call us up a week after Easter, and if they do we are pretty sure of getting a week's leave to go wherever we like. If so, I'll come up. I'll let you know before I come.

Now to answer a few of your questions, Sweet. I haven't taken any snaps of myself yet and haven't enough cash to get a couple of big ones (10 x 8 they are) but I'll see what I can do. Will that suit you, Precious?

You haven't many questions this time except wanting to know if I still drink, and asking me not to go kissing the girls here. As for the last question, you know I won't; and the first one – very seldom do I have a drink, let alone get drunk. How does that suit you, eh?

I can't think of any more news except I've been going to the pictures a fair bit lately. By myself, of course. I'm keeping true to you. How do you like that?

Well, Darling, I'm signing off now. I've got to get ready to go on my beat again. If I think of any more news while I'm away, I'll write it in.

Grand Rounds<sup>1</sup> was just here, and in the rush to get the guard out somebody put their foot on my writing pad. Excuse the dirt, scribble and everything else please. So long, Dearest. Lots of love and kisses for my Darling.

*From your dearest NED*

1. Grand Rounds: Ned may have been referring to a visit by medical staff whose job it was to present health information to the trainees. But this is only a guess. Grand Rounds, in a medical sense, is when the medical problems and treatment of a particular

patient are presented to a group of doctors and medical students for discussion. More likely, Ned may have used the term simply to refer to an unexpected visit by high-ranking officers for an inspection, thus the scramble "to get the guard out".

*Reg No. A551698  
'B' Coy, 47 Bn  
Fraser's Paddock, Enoggera  
Thursday, 28 March 1940*

DEAREST MABEL – I'm just dropping you a line to let you know everything's okay down here. How did you spend Easter up there? I didn't have much of one down here. We didn't get a full day's outing out of the four. When we were not on guard they found more duties in camp and we had to be back early, so it spoilt our holidays altogether.

Mum and Dad are going to take a flat at Sandgate and live there, so when I'm called up for the AIF I'll be able to slip down on leave every now and then. I wish you could meet them some time. Mum likes the snap of you even though I told her it wasn't a nice one. When are you sending a decent one to me?

By the way, I grew a moustache since I have been here. The boys reckoned it looked okay, the second best in the hut. It's gone now, so you won't be able to see it unless it shows in some of the snaps. I shaved it off because I was in a hurry to get to town one night and didn't have time to trim it up. I might grow another one yet, I don't know.

Tuesday we went out on the range and fired the Lewis machine gun. I got passed, that was the main thing. We fired 90 rounds altogether. They had a boxing tournament tonight amongst the boys. I didn't try my hand as I don't like getting knocked about for nothing.

Well, Dearest, I'm writing against time again. Lights-out is just sounding. It's ¼ past 10 now so I'll sign off. Lots of love and kisses for my precious Darling.

*From your loving Sweet Heart  
NED*



*Reg No. A551698  
'B' Coy, 47 Bn  
Fraser's Paddock, Enoggera  
Monday, 1 April 1940*

DEAREST MABEL – Well, Precious, have you forgotten me already? Or are you just peeved because I didn't answer your last letter soon enough? I'm sorry if that's the trouble, but I couldn't help it. Anyway, I hope that's not the reason and that I get your letter tomorrow.

Dearest, I hope to be up there next weekend. I have put in for five days' leave to come up and see you. It mightn't be granted to me, but here's hoping. I think I have a fair chance of getting it as I haven't had a weekend's leave since I've enlisted. The only thing I want to know is: Will I be welcome at the farm or not? What do you think, Darling? Let me know if your father will be annoyed if I come up. I won't be leaving till Friday night, which means I'll arrive Saturday afternoon. I'll send a telegram if I can come. If you don't get a telegram you'll know I won't be coming.

They have been making us work the last week. We have been out all day on stunts and digging trenches. Also, we had the Governor General, Lord Gowrie, to see us one day last week. The worst is to come yet. This week we have to camp out in the trenches one night, and out in the open another.

I saw Mother today. She's going up to Cloyna<sup>1</sup> on Tuesday and expects to be there about a month. Then she'll come back to Brisbane. She wants me to ask you to come down for a holiday and stay with her. Do you think you could manage it? We'll talk it over when I see you – if I do.

Well, Darling, I'm signing off now with lots of love and kisses for my Sweet Heart. Pleasant dreams.

*NED*

P.S. I'm trying to get a big photo for you before I come up on leave, but I might not be able to get to town to have it taken, so wish me luck.

*Love from Ned.*

1. Cloyna, 15 miles north of Wondai, is where Ned's parents had a farm.

**Opposite:** Dawn beside the farmhouse near Monto.  
"Mum likes the snap of you even though I told her it wasn't a nice one."  
[Ned, NF93, 1940]

**Right:** The farmhouse near Monto.  
[Ned, NF84, 1940]

*Reg No. A551698  
'B' Coy, 47 Bn  
Fraser's Paddock, Enoggera  
Thursday, 4 April 1940*

TO MY DEAREST LOVE – Well, Precious, we have just returned from a stunt and I am feeling pretty tired. We left camp yesterday morning with full packs, about 45 lbs, and marched 14 miles. Had dinner and tea out on the field. As our platoon was the enemy and was to be positioned away from the rest of the 47th Battalion, we had to march further out after tea. The plan was for us to attack the battalion about 4 o'clock this morning from across a river, but the weather took a turn for the worse and it rained fairly heavy, hard enough to make the battalion turn round and march home. It took them four hours. We were about 2 miles further out, so our Captain decided our platoon should stay the night in a church and march home in the morning. We had breakfast about ½ past 6 on one slice of bread and butter, and one boiled egg. Imagine marching 15 miles with packs and rifles, also two Lewis Guns, on that.

We left at 7.30 and arrived in camp 11.30. Were we pleased when we got in, too. Also very pleased when they said we could have our dinner right away. It tasted better than any food has for a long time and we certainly did justice to it.

Our platoon was picked as the enemy in the stunt last night because we are the pick of the battalion – and don't we think ourselves pretty good. I suppose all this bores you stiff, so I'll stop talking about it and I'll close.

*With lots of love and kisses  
from your ever-loving  
NED*

P.S. Hello, Dearest, I'm back again. I was just told I have my leave, so I'll see you on Saturday. I hope you get this letter before I arrive<sup>2</sup>. Goodnight Darling.

*Love from NED*

2. Ned wrote this letter Thursday afternoon. Dawn probably did receive it before Ned arrived, because in those days the Post Office had Saturday deliveries.







**Above and centre:** Dawn and Ned near the cream shed on the Monto farm while Ned was on leave, 6/4/1940 – 10/4/1940. It was during this visit that Ned started calling Mabel, "Dawn". In his first letter after his leave, Ned was still hesitant about the new name, putting it in quotation marks (see over page).  
[DF43, NF18, April 1940]





**Above:** Dawn near the cream shed in 2003, mimicking her pose of 63 years previously.  
[Guy Burns, GK91, 3/8/2003]



Reg No. A551698  
 'B' Coy, 47 Bn  
 Frasers Paddock  
 Thursday, 11 April 1940

To my Darling "Dawn".

Well, Dearest Im.

writing this letter about 15 miles from camp. To be exact, we are camped at Deagon Racecourse about 1½ miles from Sandgate, living out in the open on our blankets. That's where we sleep. We arrived here at 9 o'clock tonight and it's now 9.30. We have just finished tea – and we needed it, too, after marching 4½ miles in ¾ hour. It was fast, hot work. We started off at the head of the brigade and arrived 15 minutes before the others. All the light I've got is from a lantern, so excuse the writing. I hope you can understand it. We might camp here again tomorrow night as we don't go back to Frasers till Saturday afternoon.

I arrived back in Brisbane at 6 o'clock Wednesday. I had a good trip from Monto on the train as I slept nearly all the way. I wish I was back up there with you again, my Precious.

I hope you will forgive me, but I might not get this letter posted till Sunday as I have no ink or stamps for the envelope. Please don't be angry and think I've forgotten to write.

*With lots of love and kisses for  
 my darling precious "Dawn"  
 from yours truly  
 NED*

P.S. I'm sending this from Sandgate as I'm in a hurry, Love.

NED





Reg No. A551698  
 'B' Coy, 47 Bn  
 Frasers Paddock  
 Monday, 15 April 1940

TO MY PRECIOUS DAWN – Well, Dearest, I haven't heard from you yet and I'm a bit peeved. You could have written before you received my letter, couldn't you now, Darling? I went to a lot of bother getting that Sandgate letter away. I know it wasn't much of a letter, but it was the best I could do out there where we were. Anyway, I'll forgive you, my Sweet, and I hope everything is going okay with you.

They are making us work now, Darling. We didn't get any sleep Friday night. We camped on the beach at Sandgate till midnight, then staged a withdrawal from there in the dark and marched to a place called Boondall<sup>1</sup> and set up a position there till next morning. Then we marched 17 miles into camp. Was I tired? I'll say I was.

We went for a route march this morning for 2½ hours – about 7 or 8 miles. Tomorrow we go by train to Ipswich, then we manoeuvre from there to Marburg. From then on nobody knows whether we march or take a train back. I hope we come back by train. In this stunt we have the Light Horse and the Scotties, about four battalions, and some of the RAAF planes, so we'll have to work hard to do our best, Darling.

Oh, by the way, we are marching through Brisbane next Monday, our whole brigade, and then on the 24th we leave for home and march in Wondai on the 25th, Anzac Day. I haven't heard any more about the AIF, Dearest, so keep on praying and your chin up. I'll do my best to get over to Monto for the show, but I'll only have about £1 left at the break of camp, so we'll see how everything shapes, Dear.

I'll write again when I have some more time, my Darling Dawn, so don't worry if you don't get another letter for a while as it will be nearly impossible to write before Sunday. I'll close, my Precious. I can hear them singing *God Save the King* at the concert, so it's finished and the boys will soon return.

Goodnight, my darling precious Dawn.

*I remain your ever-loving*

Ned  
 x x x x x

1. See map p69



**Above:** The 14th letter received by Dawn, postmarked 16/4/1940. Ned still used "Mabel" on his envelopes because "Dawn" was used only between themselves at this stage.

**Opposite:** Ned's battalion on manoeuvres at Sandgate. The soldiers are unidentified. [Ned, NF20, April 1940]

**Below:** Marburg, taken while on manoeuvres. [Ned, NF15, April 1940]



*Reg No. A551698  
'B' Coy, 47 Bn  
Fraser's Paddock  
Friday, 19 April 1940*

TO MY PRECIOUS DAWN – I received your welcome letter this afternoon when we returned from Marburg. We had a pretty rotten time out there. It was cold and we had to get up at all hours of the night to attack or retreat. The meals were fairly scattered, and at times we were darn near starving.

Well, Dearest, that's enough about our stunt. I think I told you that we are marching through Brisbane on Monday, didn't I?

Darling, I don't know just when I'll be able to come up again as I'll have to go to Wondai when we finish our three months at camp, and then on to Cloyna to get my belongings. By that time I'll be pretty near broke again, as usual, so I might have to get a job before I can come up, Sweet Heart.

And, Dear, I wish you had sent that coconut ice down. I would have just loved it.

Well, Dearest, camp's nearly finished now. You had better send your next letter to: C/- Mr A.W. Flewell-Smith, Cloyna, via Murgon, as you won't receive this till after we leave. By the way, this is the third letter I've written since I came back. I don't know why you haven't received my first letter.

Darling, there's no more news. The boys are getting ready for a feast. We have collected some tucker and are going to enjoy ourselves and then get to bed. We have been up since 3 o'clock this morning so you can guess how tired we are.

*Here's lots of love and kisses  
from your ever-loving NED*



*C/- D.C. Flewell-Smith  
Wondai  
Kingaroy Line  
Saturday, 27 April 1940*

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – I'm very sorry about the delay in answering your last letter, Precious, but I didn't receive it till the night before I left camp to come back, and since I've been back I've been trying to find a job. Clive<sup>1</sup> and I went over to Cloyna Friday to see Mum, and today out to Proston, but there's not much work around at present. I have one job, or at least an offer of one, that I have to see about tomorrow, pulling cowpeas. I don't care much for it, but it's better than nothing. So much for excuses, eh, Dearest. I suppose you think I'm all excuses.

The boys over here want me to play football tomorrow. I want to play, very much so, but I went skating the other night with some of the boys from camp and we started acting the fool and had quite a few busters. I'm still sore, worse luck.

I'm not coming up for the show, Dear. I couldn't, even if I wanted to. I can't come up because I have got to borrow the stamp to post this letter, that's how much money I have.

The Captain of our company wants the Wondai Platoon to go up to Kingaroy on May 1st to be a guard of honour for the Governor who will be opening the Kingaroy Show.

Well, Dearest, I don't think I can write much more as I'm nearly asleep. Goodnight and pleasant dreams.

*Lots of love and kisses  
from your ever-loving Sweet Heart  
NED*

P.S. Dearest, I got the snaps I took. The one of me and one of you are okay, so I'll send you some when I get more printed. Goodnight, Sweet Heart.

*Love and kisses  
NED*

1. Clive – Ned's older brother.





*I put my hand in a pocket and drew forth a letter*

Mr D.C. Flewell-Smith  
Wondai  
Kingaroy Line  
Wednesday, 1 May 1940

TO MY DARLING DAWN – Well, Dearest, I got a surprise this morning when I got dressed in my uniform. I put my hand in a pocket and drew forth a letter – your last one. I didn't know just what it was at first and I couldn't think of how it got there. But I know now. I gave my uniform to Mum to press last Friday and she put the letter inside a pocket on Sunday when I was away and forgot to tell anyone. God knows when I would have discovered it if I hadn't decided to go to the Kingaroy Show. More than likely I would not have seen it till I was called up for the AIF.

Well, Dearest, the show wasn't the best, not for this visitor anyway. There was too much red soil. It was terrible. All you had to do was wipe your face with a hanky and it was covered in red from the dust. I didn't see much as I was near broke. I had to borrow some cash off Clive. Matter of fact, my Precious, I wouldn't have gone if they hadn't paid our fare up and let us in for nix, so we did all right, didn't we.

I'll send you two snaps when I get them printed. I'll put them in tomorrow to be done, so I'll send them in my next letter if possible. I'll also be getting some proofs for the big photos soon and I might send them over to you so you can decide which is the best.

Well, Darling, you seem to think you'll be allowed to go to Brisbane for the Exhibition. That would suit me, but just what would your father say if he knew I was to be there? He wouldn't let you go, would he. Anyway, I hope to have enough money by then to go along.

I'm off to see the Police Sergeant tomorrow to see if he can find me a job. He is very keen to get some new footballers and I'll play if he can get me a job.

Well, Dearest, I'm fairly tired and have a headache from the dust at the show and from being on my feet all day.

*With love and kisses from your  
truly-loving Sweet Heart  
NED*

P.S. I'm sending you a bit of a present I got made at the show today for you. I hope you will like it, Darling. I'm enclosing the present inside. Hope it doesn't get broken.

*Love from NED*

Mr D.C. Flewell-Smith  
Wondai  
Kingaroy Line  
3.5.40

*To My Most Adorable Dawn.*

*I recieved two of your  
letters today & I was delighted till I read the last*

one. That wasn't quite nice of you was it, Dearest, although I suppose you are right. They say girls are always right don't they, my Sweet. You had quite a lot to say in that letter, but as I say, I suppose you are justified as I still haven't got a job. Although I must say one thing in my defence – there are four others in Wondai who haven't got jobs since they came back from camp.

I hope you enjoyed yourself at the show with Hardy, because I didn't enjoy myself much at Kingaroy. There were more military guards about than loose girls, even if I had wanted to pick one up. And as for not thinking of you, my Love... I'm always thinking of you. That's why I go skating to try to get you off my mind a bit. I'm always wishing you were here with me. You are always in my thoughts.

Did you get the brooch I enclosed in my last letter? I hope it wasn't broken. Did you like it?

You said in one of your letters about Evelyn saying the only way for me to make good would be to get married and go on a share farm. It would suit me if your father was willing – and also, of course, you – but we would have to wait for the AIF to reject me and that doesn't seem likely at present, does it. Anyway, I'll marry you anytime if you want to, Precious, that's all I have to say.

*I remain  
your Everloving Sweetheart  
and Lover. Ned*

Opposite left: Dawn at the farmhouse, Monto.  
[Ned, NF11, 1940]

Opposite right: Ned in uniform, unknown location.  
[Ned, NF19, 1940]

## *I wish I had a magic carpet*

*C/- Mr D.C. Flewell-Smith  
Wondai, Kingaroy Line  
Tuesday, 7 May 1940*

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – I promised to write to you Sunday, but here it is Tuesday morning and nothing done.

Well, Dear, I've had a rather hectic weekend. I suppose you would call it hectic. Clive came down from Murgon and wanted me to go back with him to the pictures that night. Anyway, I went and it was a good program. We stayed in Murgon till next morning and then went out to see Mum at Cloyna.

Now for some good news. When we were coming back I called in at a property at Merlwood, about 9 miles from Murgon. I heard the owner might want a worker. And he did, offering 30/- a week. I was supposed to start today, but I won't go out till this evening.

*With lots of love and kisses  
to you my precious Dawn  
NED*

*Merlwood  
via Murgon  
Friday, 10 May 1940*

TO MY DARLING DAWN – Received your ever-welcome letter on Tuesday just before I left to come here to work, so I couldn't answer it before. I've been out here three days now and am getting on okay after my long holiday. They milk by hand here. There's not many cows thank God. I'm ploughing at present with horses. He hasn't got a tractor. When I say "at present" I mean today and again tomorrow. I hope you understand. Anyway, I don't think I will be here long, not by what came over the wireless this morning. It doesn't sound too long before I'll be called up.

Precious, Mum doesn't know just when she's going back to Brisbane, but it won't be long. She says she will write to your father and ask him to let you come down.

Well, Sweet Heart, I'm glad you like the brooch. It arrived in one piece then. I thought it might get broken in the letter.

Gee, Darling, I wish I had a magic carpet or something, and then all I'd have to say is "Hey Presto" and I would be over there with you. I get terrible lonely over here with only letters and snaps to remind me of you.

Goodnight, Sweet Heart. I'm in bed writing this letter and I'm afraid I can't write any more tonight. I just fell asleep.

*With lots of Love & kisses  
to my Dearest Love.  
From your ever loving  
Sweet Heart. Ned*

Right: Ned's AIF pay book.  
[Ned, NF07, 1940]

6

**SOLDIER'S NAME AND DESCRIPTION ON ENLISTMENT**

Army Number QX 3199

Surname (in capital letters) FLEWELL-SMITH

Other Names (in full) Edgar Johns

Date of Birth 7/6/19 Place of Birth

Trade or Calling Labourer

Religion Meth Enlisted on 20/5/40

Signature of Soldier



## *I'm in the AIF, Sweet Heart*

*Merlwood  
via Murgon  
Sunday, 12 May 1940*

TO MY MOST ADORABLE DAWN – Well, Dearest, I'm dropping you this line to tell you I've been called up to go before a medical board in Maryborough on Monday 20th May for final examination. If I pass I go straight on to Brisbane the same day. I'm going to Maryborough on Saturday and stopping with my cousins there till Monday.

When you come down to Brisbane we'll only be together when I get leave from camp, so we'll have to make the best of it. I'll do my best to get in to meet you when you come down.

There was a dance at Merlwood last night and a lot of Wondai people came out. Wasn't I peeved when I went to collect the mail this morning and first heard about it.

Today I had a couple of games of tennis. They were playing matches here, so I hopped in and had a smack. It's nearly 3½ years since I had a decent game. It hardly seems real that I'm playing tennis and worrying about missing dances, when on the other side of the world men are shooting each other. It's getting pretty serious now – the war, I mean. It looks as if Britain will be flat out to win.

Anyway, that's enough about those things, isn't it, Dearest. We'll just have to make the most of it when you come down if I'm still in camp.

Well, Sweet Heart, I'll write again before Monday to let you know any news. Goodnight my love. Pleasant dreams.

*With lots of luck  
kisses and happiness  
love NED*

*Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
Reg No. QX 3199, 2/15 Bn  
AIF Redbank  
Tuesday, 21 May 1940*

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Well, Darling, I'm sorry I haven't written before. I know I should have, but it's been a bit of a rush.

I'm in the AIF, Sweet Heart. I guess I'll go right through now. We go in for the X-rays tomorrow and we also shift camp. God knows to where – I don't. We are at Frasers at present. I'm in the same hut and have the same position for my bed as last time I was here, so I shouldn't get mixed up, should I.

Well, Precious, I left Wondai Saturday morning. I went to the Murgon Show Friday. It was a pretty fair show. I was with Clive nearly all day. By the way, Clive is going to join the AIF too. I suppose he will have signed up by now as he got the papers as I was leaving.

When I arrived in Maryborough Saturday afternoon, my auntie and uncle met me and took me out to their home. I had to drive their car into the Drill Hall (in Maryborough) on Sunday and also on Monday. We were given a supper and entertained by the RSSILA<sup>1</sup> and the Ladies Auxiliary. We left there ½ past 10 last night and arrived in Brisbane 6 o'clock this morning and have been busy all day getting most of our gear together. It's a damn nuisance, all this movement. I started this letter this morning and I'll have to stop again – it will be tea time in a minute.

Well, Dearest, we move to Redbank tomorrow night or the next morning. I'll be in the Infantry 2/15th Battalion. There are three of us who've palled up here, and when I said where I was going they came with me.

Precious, I can't tell you my correct address because I don't know. Nobody knows. Address it to the address on the letter. I'm fairly sure to get it, and in the meantime I'll find out the correct one.

I haven't received a letter from you since the last letter I wrote. I know it's not your fault, it's mine for joining up and moving about so much. I'm getting lost without your letters, my Love.

*With lots of love and kisses  
from your ever-loving  
Sweet Heart  
NED*

*To the One I Love*

1. Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia, now the RSL.

Description of SX 3199  
on enlistment—

Height 5 ft. 9 1/2 ins. Weight 140 lbs.

Chest (max.) 37 ins. Complexion Dark

Eyes Light Brown Hair Dark Brown

Marks or Scars Scar R/Leg.

Physical disabilities (if any) and special characteristics (e.g., impediment in speech).....



## *You can't kill a Bad Penny, Dearest*

Reg No. QX 3199

'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn

AIF Redbank

Monday, 27 May 1940

TO MY DEAREST BELOVED – I received your precious letter this morning when we were on parade and haven't had time to read it till now. I don't suppose I'll be able to finish it till tonight as we go on parade again in a little while.

Well, Sweet Heart, I've only been here since last Thursday and it seems like a year. It's a great camp, but it's a long way out of Brisbane and it's also fairly dirty. We are having pictures here tonight and a concert on Wednesday night. There's only a few of us in camp at present. We are the only complete platoon in the 2/15th Battalion: No. 1 Section of No. 16 Platoon of 'D' Company, so we can say we were the first section and platoon formed in Queensland for the 7th Division. And are we proud of it? I'll say we are!

WELL, MY PRECIOUS, I'm back again to try and finish this letter. I've been to the pictures tonight but I wanted to finish this letter if I could, so I came back. I have still to receive a letter of yours that you wrote before I left Wondai; also to hear from Mum to know just when she's coming to Brisbane.

There is a rumour that we have only six weeks' training before we leave for overseas. We know that we won't stay too long. It's common knowledge that they are rushing us through as soon as possible.

Today we had our first real training, or at least the new recruits had, and it was about one week's training crammed into one day. So you see they don't want to keep us here too long.

Darling, I couldn't say what my opinion is on your coming down, and when. I wish you could come and stay till I left, but that seems rather hopeless. I think you had better come down here when I get final leave, or a little while before, and then I might spend it with you back up there.

Sweet Heart, I'm getting my photos on the 8th June so I'll send you two. They are just plain black and white ones, but I'm thinking of getting some extras when I'm a bit more financial.

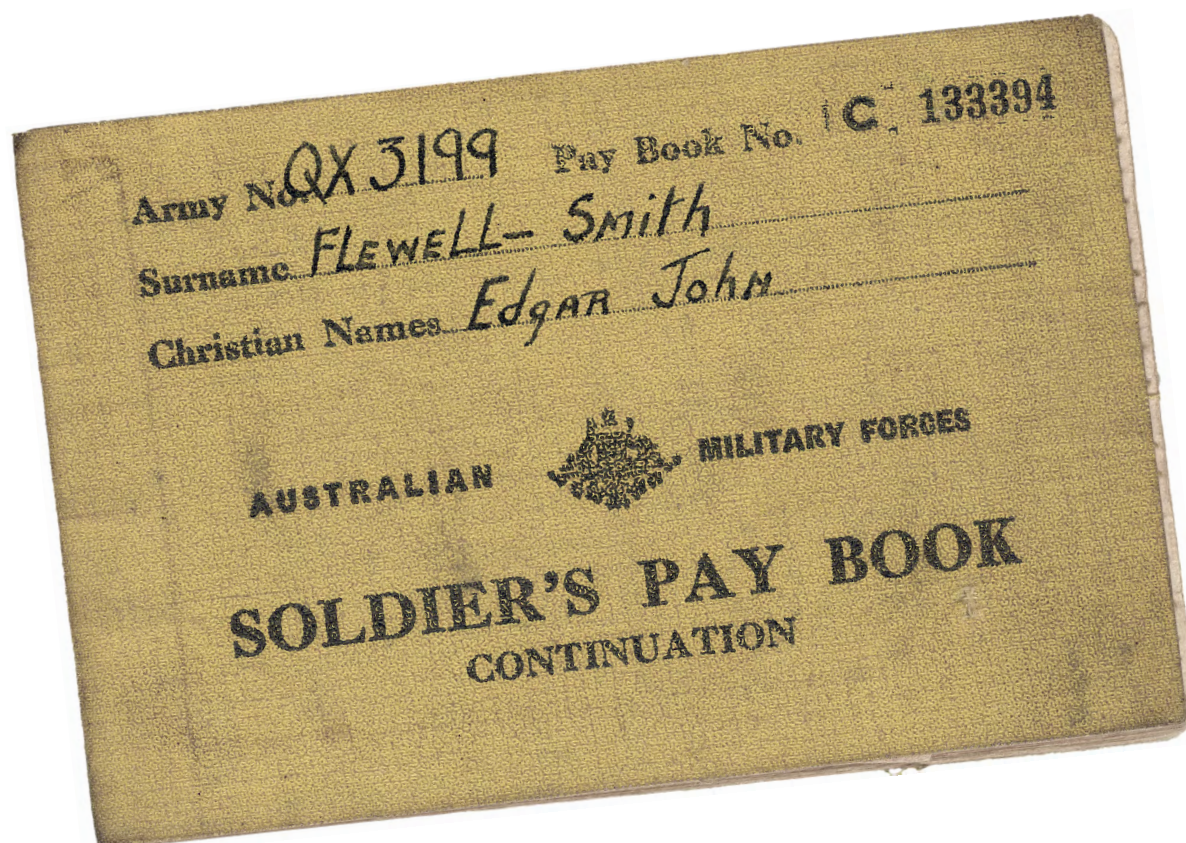
One other thing: don't worry about me not coming back, because I'll come back. You can't kill a Bad Penny<sup>1</sup>, Dearest.

Well, my Love, I'm signing off as I'm nearly asleep, a chronic happening with me down here. Excuse the scribble, Darling.

*From your ever-loving  
and lonely Sweet Heart*

NED

1. The phrase "Bad Penny" that Ned uses to refer to himself comes from a longer phrase that is typically heard as "A bad penny always turns up". It means that a no-good person can be counted upon to return again and again.



**Left:** The front of Ned's cloth-covered pay book.  
[Ned, NF07, 1940]

**Opposite:** "Matter of fact, Darling, you look lovely."  
This is the photo that Ned took with him to the Middle East. It can be seen on the dirt wall of his dugout at Tobruk – see p113.  
[Dawn, DF11, 1940]



With the Compliments of



THE SAILORS AND SOLDIERS' CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
HELP SOCIETY  
FOUNDED 1915

30 May 1940  
Q.X. 3199  
D'loy 2/15 Br.  
Redbank.

To My Dearest Sweetheart.

Well, Precious. I received two

of your loving letters yesterday and I was very pleased to get them. They were the best letters I've ever received, Dearest, so write me some more just like them.

Darling, I happened to be looking inside the envelope one of your last letters came in when I got a surprise. I found a snap of you. I thought you meant you would send it with the next letter. It's a really nice snap of you. It's the best I've got of you, Sweet Heart. If you haven't had your hair cut by now, please leave it. It looks very pretty in the snap. Matter of fact, Darling, you look lovely.

Well, they are certainly making us step it out now and they are pretty strict. We have to get dressed in our uniforms for supper parade – wouldn't that rip you. They have put me in the mess hut (that's the cook house in case you don't know) two full days already.

Dearest, I think you should come down fairly soon as they are rushing us through and I don't think we will be here any longer than six weeks. Of course I might be mistaken. I haven't heard from home to tell me when they will be down. I hope it won't be long.

We had a concert here last night. It was good, too. They used to come out to Frasers when we were there.

Well, my Precious, I think I'll close as there is not much news here. So, goodnight my most precious Darling.

From yours ever truly  
NED

P.S. Dearest, I wish you were down here. It would be grand to see you a couple of times a week, Love. I don't like to close this letter, Sweet Heart, in case I have forgotten anything. Darling, I think I'm loving you more with every letter and snap I get from you. Goodnight.

Love NED





QX 3199  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
 AIF Redbank  
 Sunday, 2 June 1940

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Well, Dearest, I suppose this note will surprise you, but as I'm staying in camp this weekend and I've nothing to do tonight I thought I would drop you a line just because I'm feeling a bit lonely.

I just met one of the boys of the old platoon. He is the only one here so far, but he says a few more are coming up shortly.

There's not much news here at all, except that they seem to give me more fatigue work than ever. I think it's because my name is easy to remember. All the officers seem to know me and what they say is not always very flattering, I can tell you.

There's only a few of the boys in camp tonight so it's very quiet. I'm thinking of spending next weekend in Brisbane if I can get leave.

Well, Dearest, I've got a devil of a cold. At times I can hardly talk. I reported sick the other morning and they gave me some stuff to drink. I was supposed to report for some more, but I've been caught once but never again – the cure was a darn site worse than the complaint.

The war is looking pretty serious now, isn't it. It might be all over before we get there if it keeps on like it is.

I hope I see you soon, Sweet Heart. That's all I want as a present.

*Good night my Darling  
 Sweet Heart. Wishing all the  
 Best. From your ever  
 truly loving Ned.*

QX 3199  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
 AIF Redbank  
 Tuesday, 4 June 1940

MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – I received your latest letter only this morning, but as the time hangs heavy on our hands down here we can write nearly to our heart's content. That is, of course, if there is any news about.

I suppose you read about the recruit at Frasers in the paper by now. The detectives were out today questioning. All the chaps say, who saw him, that he was murdered without a doubt, as he couldn't tie himself up as he was. It's nice to think that we might have a murderer with us in camp.

Well, Precious, I can't think of anything else to write about. I'm sorry, Sweet Heart, that I only write about two pages to your five, but I guess I wasn't cut out to be a letter writer. Anyway, my Love, there's pictures here tonight so I'll be able to tell you about them next letter if I can't think of anything else, eh.

Did I tell you I sent away the watch you gave me to get cleaned up? Well I did, Darling. I hope it pleases you.

My Darling, you say you wish you could see me again soon. Well, my Precious, I think I'm slowly dying for want of a look at you. I'm signing off with lots of love and kisses for my precious Darling.

*From your ever-loving NED*

**Right:** The 25th letter received by Dawn, postmarked 4/6/1940.





QX 3199  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
 AIF Redbank  
 Tuesday, 11 June 1940

TO MY DARLING DAWN – Thank you, Darling, for the birthday wishes. Yours was the first to arrive and it was very sweet of you to send them. I also received your last letter the same day, and one from Mum. Also a birthday telegram from her, so I guess I was in the boom for a while, wasn't I.

Well, Precious, I went to Brisbane for a short weekend to collect your watch and the photos, but everything seemed to go wrong. First, Keith<sup>1</sup> forgot to take a slip of paper to collect the watch with, and so they wouldn't give it to him. Secondly, they couldn't find the photos. The girl I generally see about things was off duty and the other one didn't know much about them. So God knows when I'll get them now as it's ten to one I'll be on duty next weekend. I was supposed to be on duty this weekend, but as I had been granted leave they took pity on me and took me off duty for once.

Something else happened over the weekend too, to crown the lot off, and that was I developed the Redbank Cough as they call it. Anyway, I'm off duty for today. I'm lying down in the hut writing this, all done (poor bugger I am). I'm that dopey I feel as if I could go to sleep and never wake up.

There's talk of starting the 8th Division on the 7th July and training them at Enoggera, so we might stay a lot longer than formerly, but there is also a rumour that the 7th Division is to start getting final leave in a fortnight's time. Of course, it might not be true.

Sweet Heart, come down as soon as you can and stop at your friend's place, then go and stop with Mum. Of course, if you like, you can come out to Redbank and stop with me, my Sweet. Wouldn't that get you shot, eh – and me to.

Darling, I don't like what you said about coming down to see me off. The way you put it, it sounded like as if you would only be down for, at most, a couple of days. I want you down here for a fortnight at least, and forever if possible.

Dearest, I have to close as this is all the news and all the paper I've got. Wishing you all the best.

*Love and kisses from yours ever*  
 NED

QX 3199  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
 AIF Redbank  
 Monday, 17 June 1940

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Well, Precious, just when are you coming down? I hope it's soon. I haven't received a letter from you for a whole week and I am beginning to feel slightly neglected. We had sports here this afternoon and we were allowed to bring friends into camp. I was wishing you were here so you could have come.

They haven't delivered our mail today, so now I suppose we won't get it till tomorrow, worse luck.

I went to Brisbane last Sunday and collected the watch.

I'm beginning to be a regular stay at home. I didn't go out once last week, and tonight there was a boxing tournament but I decided to stay in the hut. I was the only one here. The boys are just arriving home from the fight and say it wasn't much good, so I didn't miss much I guess.

Well, my precious Sweet Heart, I think I'll close for tonight as I'm sure I'll get a letter from you in the morning and I'll start over again. Excuse the scribble won't you, my Love, as I'm lying in bed writing this. I'll think of something else to tell you tomorrow.

Goodnight and sweet dreams till I see you again.

*Love NED*

HELLO, MY DARLING. I'm back again like a Bad Penny. I didn't receive a letter today so I'm a very disappointed man. It seems a devil of a long time since I got one from you.

Well, Dear, last night I thought I would be able to finish this letter tonight in comfort, but it's not to be. They (the heads I mean) sprung a surprise this morning and detailed our company for guard. Only 12 men were wanted, but, of course, poor little me cops it. So here I am on guard.

I just had the pleasure of arresting a chap on a pretty serious offence; one of the worst offences in the army, matter of fact. Some money has disappeared lately in camp, out of the huts, but they had the numbers of some of the £ notes that were stolen. Anyway, this chap tried to pass one of them over the canteen and got caught. I had the rotten luck to be relieving one of the other guards, so they called on me to do my stuff.

Well, Darling, I've just about spun out of news. The only thing left to talk about is: when are you coming down? And the war. But I don't want to talk about the war, we get enough of it down here. Things look a bit serious now over the other side – but wait till *we* get there.

Goodnight Darling, and pleasant dreams.

*Wishing you lots of love and kisses*  
 NED

P.S. Sweet Heart, I've nearly forgot what you look like, so hurry and let me get another look at you before I go.

*Love and kisses from NED*

1. Keith was one of Ned's brothers.

QX 3199  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
 AIF Redbank  
 Thursday, 20 June 1940

TO MY MOST PRECIOUS DARLING – I received your letter last night when we came off guard, and although I was damn tired I was that pleased to get it I could have stood on my head with joy. Matter of fact, the boys noticed the change in me and started chucking off and acting the goat.

Two tanks arrived here the other day. They are only small ones, but can they move? I'll say they can. They can do about 50 mph. I wouldn't like to be in front trying to stop any of them.

One of the boys just came out of hospital today and the others in the hut are trying to bring him up to scratch on how to use his rifle. We go to the range for a shoot tomorrow. All the boys are looking forward to it so as to try the new rifles out. They are practising in the hut – and two have a Lewis Gun so it's slightly crowded here tonight.

Well, Darling, I mightn't come up for final leave. More than likely I won't. If I did come up and was given a send off, I would have to give a speech so I think I'll call it off. I'm sorry, Dear.

I suppose it will surprise you to see I'm writing in ink. One of the boys had a fountain pen so I collared it, but I'll have to finish now as the pen's running dry. Also, I've got to get some sleep for tomorrow.

It's still pretty cold here. Every night we get a fog that thick you can't see more than about 10 yards.

Goodnight, Sweet Heart. The pen has had it now; it's bone dry. Look after yourself, Darling.

*Lots of love and kisses  
 from NED*

P.S. Don't forget to hurry up and come down, Sweet Heart. I'm dying for want of a look at you, Precious. Goodnight.

*Love NED*

**Right:** Dawn on the Monto farm, milk shed in background.

[Ned, NF97, 1940]

QX 3199  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
 AIF Redbank  
 Thursday, 27 June 1940

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Precious, I just received another edition of your short stories and was very pleased to get it. I didn't expect one for another couple of days at least.

Dawn, it's quite hopeless to expect to get four or five days' leave to come up and bring you down. The most I might get is three days, and that is also pretty hopeless as they are tightening up our leave now. Sweet Heart, you had best come as soon as possible and stay as long as you can. Your father, it seems, still doesn't trust me, eh, Honey. He thinks I might run away with you.

Darling, I'll wire you if I get three days' leave to come up, but if you can come down before, do so, as I don't think I can get leave.

*Good Night & Pleasant Dreams  
 Lots of Love & Kisses  
 From your  
 Loving Soldier Boy  
 Ned.*





QX 3199  
*D' Coy, 2/15 Bn*  
*AIF Redbank*  
*Friday, 28 June 1940*

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Darling, I have some bad news for you. Our battalion will be on the move by the time you read this. We have to stand-to from Saturday till when we go, either Monday or Tuesday. They only told us the news last night. We are only going for service in Australia, so we'll get final leave after this move. If we don't, well, we won't talk about it now. We haven't the slightest idea just where we are going. The rumour is Darwin, but that's only guessing. We are likely to be called on at anytime to do anything.

Precious, excuse this scribble, but I'm writing this in the army's time so I have to hurry. I'm on leave this evening for the last time and want to say goodbye to all down here. It's a pity you didn't come down, but keep your chin up and I'll see you on final leave, Dearest.

Precious, I'll have to close as I want to post this in camp. I hope this finds you well. Don't take this move too much to heart, Dearest, it's just fate.

*Wishing you all my love, Darling*  
*and hoping to see you soon*  
 NED

QX 3199  
*D' Coy, 2/15 Bn*  
*C/- GPO Brisbane*  
*Saturday, 29 June 1940*

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Well, Darling, we are leaving on Monday for a destination unknown at present. All we know is that we march through Brisbane some time Monday. We don't even know what time yet, or whether we leave by train or boat. More than likely by boat. They are stopping the march for three minutes in town to say our goodbyes to anyone we know, but we are not allowed to break ranks. So, Darling, it's just a mystery to us down here, just as it is to you up there.

We have to hand in all our equipment, including our rifles, tomorrow morning. All we take with us is our own personal effects. In the march through Brisbane we carry nothing. Just march in our uniform. No one wants to march like that. Even the Colonel tried to change it, but the military authorities said no. It's got us all beat – no gear and rushing us away like this. It's got everyone thinking and guessing.

Dawn Darling, don't worry about me will you, my Sweet. We aren't going out of Australia yet and we will get final leave for sure. Maybe we are shifting up north somewhere. It might be nearer you for all we know.

We get inspected tomorrow at 2 o'clock by some big head. We also have a band here now. The instruments arrived tonight, so I think we'll have a band to march along to, thank God.

Precious, you can see where to address your letters to. The same as before, but putting c/- GPO Brisbane instead of Redbank. That's our official address from 30th June.

My dearest Sweet Heart, I'll say goodnight to you. I hate leaving without seeing you, my Love, but it just can't be helped and we have to make the best of it. We haven't even time to think now, Precious, they are rushing us too hard. We got vaccinations today for smallpox.

Darling, goodnight. Lots of love to my most precious Sweet Heart.

*From yours ever truly*  
 NED

QX 3199  
*D' Coy, 2/15 Bn*  
*C/- GPO Brisbane*  
*At Sea, Wednesday, 3 July 1940*

TO DARLING DAWN – Well, Darling, we are at sea at last, and in a way glad to be. I'm sorry you couldn't come down to see me before I left, but we were rushed away in such a hurry we didn't know ourselves when we were going. Nothing of much news has happened so far. A few of the boys were seasick yesterday, but most of them have recovered by now. I was one of the lucky ones; I didn't get sick. So far the going has been calm, hardly enough movement of the ship to make anyone sick.

Well, my Sweet, as I'm on picquet tonight I'll have to slip above and get ready. I hope I'm on duty after "lights out" as I might add a bit to this letter.

Darling, we are not allowed to tell you anything about where we are, what ship it is, or any news like that. Our letters are all checked before they are posted.

Well, Sweet Heart, I don't know when you will get this note, and God only knows when you will get the next, so don't get worried if it's a fairly long wait.

By the way, I gave Mother your address so you can expect a letter from her some time in the future.

Darling, I received a letter from my sister, Marj, the day we left and she said they were going over to Monto one day during the next month. I'll give her your address so you can meet her if you like. I suppose she will write to you.

Me leaving so soon spoilt a chance of you coming down by car. Marj was going to drive down to see me before I left and would have welcomed you as a passenger. You would have been company for her as she would have had only the kids.

I've just come off duty, Darling, and have just chipped more men in two hours than in the rest of my time in the army – for smoking. The ship's a complete blackout above decks. Not a light of any description showing on her anywhere.

Well, my Sweet, I'm signing off. I'll tell you the rest next time.

*With lots of love*  
*and kisses to you*  
 NED

QX 3199  
D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF C/- GPO Brisbane  
At Sea, Sunday, 7 July 1940

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Well, my Precious, you won't get this letter for a while yet, as we will be on land again when it is posted. Darwin more than likely. We haven't been told officially yet.

My last letter was posted in Townsville. We stopped there to take on stores and coal. We stop again at Thursday Island this afternoon about 5 o'clock.

I suppose you read in the papers just how and when we left Brisbane, so I won't bore you with the details except to say there are two ships travelling together. Our escort is a light-armed cruiser – *HMAS Manoora* I think is its name. We are on the *SS Zealandia*. This is its first voyage with troops and there are about 900 to 1000 on board. It's a bit of a crush. We sleep and eat in the same place, down in the hold, and it's the hottest place God ever made, Dearest.



There's a plague of measles broken out on board. Nearly ¼ of the boat's got them and I'm one of the unlucky ones – I've got them too. I don't feel sick, I feel very good, but the marks are all over me.

It's been a fairly good trip so far, nice and calm, and except for the first two days we have been seeing islands and reefs all the way. Some of the places are beautiful, others are only mountains of rocks and boulders.

Well, Sweet Heart, there's not much to tell you. We are not allowed to get off the boat at any port we call at, so we only see what we can from the boat, and that's not much. Most of the boys, including me, are broke, as we haven't been paid and can't draw any money out of the bank. I haven't got any film for my camera now, so I won't be able to take photos till we get paid again, worse luck.

My Precious, I'll close this letter as I want to go above and see if we have sighted Thursday Island yet. Till I start again, Dawn.

*Love from NED*

8.7.1940 – Well, my Precious, I'm back again and feeling okay. Here's hoping you are the same. We started across the gulf last night and there was a bit of a swell and it made the boat bounce a little. Some of the boys got sick again. We expect to hit Darwin tomorrow night some time. Our

escort left us today and went back, so we are by ourselves now. We haven't seen land since yesterday.

My Precious, I'm on picquet again tonight. You will think the only time I write to you is when I'm on some duty.

We put all watches back 30 minutes today so you are a bit ahead of me now, eh.

Oh, Darling, I left two big photos for you at Mum's and in the hurry I forgot all about them. I'll ask her to send them up to you.

Well, my Love, I'm closing down again till we hit Darwin. Keep saving up so that when we come back for final leave (God knows when) you can come to Brisbane. It won't be for another three to six months I suppose. Goodnight, Sweet Heart.

*Pleasant dreams to you  
NED*

11.7.1940, Darwin – Well, my Love, I'm back again at last and we are here. We pulled into the wharf Wednesday morning but only marched off the boat this morning. The only comment I can make about Darwin is that it's dry and dusty and scattered over a fairly wide area. Beer is a 1/- a pot and they tell us that there are only two things to do: gamble or get drunk. And by the look of the place it really would drive a man to drink – or else to madness.

We are camped about 3½ miles out of Darwin at Vestey's old meat works. It's a great big place and simply falling to pieces, but they tell us it's going to be a permanent camp from now on. Our officers told us today that we are only stopping here about eight weeks and then another battalion relieves us and we go back to Brisbane for six days' final leave and then straight overseas. Of course, they are just as likely to change their minds but we are hoping for the best.

Just at present we are rustling about trying to get everything fixed up for tonight. We haven't got any blankets yet, but it's that hot we only need them to lay on. There's not much news here. We've been too busy working to see or do anything.

It's our pay day tomorrow, although it's a week late. I'll post this tomorrow and wire you, too, if possible. Our address is still C/- GPO Brisbane, and as far as anyone here knows, it's our permanent one. By the way, Sweet Heart, your birthday's the 5th August isn't it?

Darling, I wish I could see you again. I'm just dying for a glimpse of you. I love you so much that I'm thinking of you all the time up here. Give my best regards to everyone down there from me. I'm going to have a shower now so I'll say goodnight. Pleasant dreams and all the best.

*Lots of Love  
from yours  
ever truly  
Sweet Heart. Ned*

**Left:** T.S.S. *Zealandia* on which Ned went from Brisbane to Darwin. "We sleep and eat in the same place, down in the hold, and it's the hottest place God ever made, Dearest."  
[Ned, NF76, 1940]

**Opposite top:** Vestey's meatworks, Ned's home for some of the time he was

in Darwin. "We are camped about 3½ miles out of Darwin at Vestey's old meat works. It's a great big place and simply falling to pieces."  
[Ned, NF26, 1940]

**Opposite bottom:** The *Zealandia* berthed at Darwin wharf.  
[Ned, NF43, 1940]







## *I don't know... it might be pride*

TO MY PRECIOUS DARLING – It's 20 days since we left Redbank, and 10 days in Darwin and no letter yet. It seems a lifetime since we arrived here. I don't know why, but the days seem to drag along and never end.

Well, my Love, we are fairly well settled here now, camped only about 300 or 400 yards from the beach. We knock off work at 1330 every day, and in the afternoon from 1530 hrs till 1640 hrs we have organised sport: swimming, cricket, hockey. So, Darling, we should be healthy enough when we get back. But for all that it's a devil of a long morning to put in.

Our officer told us today that we begin manoeuvres at the end of next week. It looks like the real training is going to start. They also told us that our battalion is going to be split up and go to different camps, all within 100 miles of Darwin. It doesn't look as if we'll be back too soon, does it.

Well, Sweet Heart, I went to the pictures in Darwin last night. Every week our platoon is given four free tickets and we draw for them. Last night I was a lucky one. It was quite a good program. *Suez* was the main show.

There's only one thing I wish for now: that I had never joined the army and had stayed with you, Sweet Heart. What would you say if I got out of the army? Would you think the same of me or not? Because at times I feel very tempted to chuck everything in and go back to civvies. I could manage to get ejected if I told the truth about my leg and said that it was giving me trouble, but I guess that would be the coward's way out, wouldn't it. Anyway, ten to one if I did do that, I'd only last a couple

QX 3199  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF  
C/- GPO Brisbane  
Tuesday, 23 July 1940

of months and I'd re-enlist. I would see some of the troops marching by and I'd join up again. It gets into your blood. I guess we say a lot of things that we really mean when we are in uniform, but if we were ejected from it we would envy the uniform chaps, after a time, and do our best to get back in. It just gets a hold on you. I don't know... it might be pride.

Sweet Heart, I suppose you will think I'm off my head or that the climate has effected me somehow. Well, maybe it has, but I hardly think so. I know this letter is a bit rambling, but you'll have to excuse it as it's just how I feel.

Well, my Precious, did Mum send you those photos? I forgot to autograph them for you before I left. I might have forgot to tell Mum to send them for all I know, I was in that much of a hurry last time I saw her and Dad.

Well, Darling, I'll close. I love you so much I'm thinking of you all the time. Your face seems to stick in my memory always. Wishing you everything of the best, Sweet Heart.

*From yours ever faithful  
Lola's Sweet Heart  
Feb.*





QX 3199  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF  
 C/- GPO Brisbane  
 Wednesday, 24 July 1940

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Well, my Darling, this is really the third attempt to write this letter, so here's wishing myself luck in finishing it this time. I first started it last night, but I decided to wait to see if there was a letter from you today. Second time I had nearly finished a page and one of the boys started acting the goat. We had a bit of a wrestle and when I started writing again I was shaking that much I only wrote a couple of lines and then ripped it up, the writing was so bad. It's rotten enough at normal times, isn't it, Darling.

Yesterday a boat came in with mail, and today something happened that our battalion has been waiting for since we arrived – the mail was handed out. I've been a bit off-colour this last week and a bit grumpy, and some of the boys were wondering why I was in such a good mood today. But who wouldn't be if they had just received *three* letters from their Sweet Heart after not hearing any news from her for over 23 days.

Well, Sweet, there's no news here. I haven't been out anywhere, except four of us went coconut hunting last Sunday and had a great time. I've been playing cricket every afternoon the last week because of nothing else to do; except swimming, and you can't stay in the water all the time. We also had a sports meeting yesterday. I entered for the 100 yards sprint. I won my heat but I cracked up in the final. Managed to finish it but I couldn't get my breath properly for half an hour, so I have decided to start training. I'm in rotten condition.

One of the boys that I palled up with at Redbank got his discharge a couple of days ago and goes back on Wednesday. I might try and get one too. That would make me very popular with your father, wouldn't it, my Sweet. I would just like to be there and hear what he said.

On Saturday a couple of us went out to the memorial in honour of the first aeroplane landing in Australia, and from there we had a look at one of the aerodromes nearby. There is one thing here that we don't get tired of, and that is watching the air force planes going through their paces. There's a fair few RAAF planes stationed here. It's really the main defence of Darwin.

My dearest Love, I'll have to sign off in a minute as three pages is all that's supposed to go by airmail. Please send your letters airmail to me, Sweet Heart, as it takes anything from three to six weeks to get here by boat.

Well, Precious, some of the boys just arrived and are fairly full. You'd think they were a pack of wild dogs by the way they are howling and carrying on. You would nearly die laughing at them.

Dearest, I'll write again soon. Goodnight and pleasant dreams.

*Love from NED*

P.S. Dawn, many happy returns for the 5th, Darling.

*Best wishes and lots of love*  
 NED



**Above:** "On Saturday a couple of us went out to the memorial in honour of the first aeroplane landing in Australia". Ned at the commemorative obelisk for the men on the first flight from England to Australia in 1919.  
 [Ned, NF33, 1940]

CAPTAIN SIR ROSS SMITH  
 AUSTRALIAN FLYING CORPS  
 LIEUTENANT SIR KEITH SMITH  
 ROYAL AIR FORCE  
 SERGEANT J.M. BENNET  
 AUSTRALIAN FLYING CORPS  
 SERGEANT W.H. SHIERS  
 AUSTRALIAN FLYING CORPS

**Above left:** "I haven't been out anywhere, except four of us went coconut hunting last Sunday and had a great time." One of Ned's mates climbing a coconut tree.  
 [Ned, NF30, 1940]

**Opposite:** "We are camped only about 300 or 400 yards from the beach." The beach near Vestey's meatworks. Two chimneys and some of the buildings of the meatworks can be seen in the distance.  
 [Ned, NF28, 1940]

*QX 3199, 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF  
C/- GPO Brisbane  
Thursday, 1 August 1940*

MY DARLING SWEET HEART – There's no news and I haven't received any more letters from you. I've just about given up hope of ever getting any.

The sports went off with a bang from what one hears. Not many from Vestey's went out to see them as nearly all of us were broke, including me. There were about 20 fights, and in one a civilian was killed. That's the main topic of conversation, the fights and nothing else. The boys who went said all of the Northern Territory must have been there by the size of the crowd.

Remember in one of my letters I said I could get out of the army if I complained about my leg? Well, training for the battalion sports the other day I jolted it in the hop step and jump, and I fell on it again today. By the feel of it I won't need to pretend about it being crook, but I still entered for the high jump and 100-yard sprint. Matter of fact, I'm representing 'D' company so I can't pull out now no matter how much I wanted to.

Well, my Precious, we go out on the range tomorrow. I'm going to close this letter till then so I can tell you how I shot. Goodnight for the present. Sweet dreams and lots of them. I hope you enjoyed your birthday and I'm very sorry I'm not down there, Sweet Heart. You'll have to wait till I come back on leave.

*Love NED*

2.8.1940 – Well, I'm here again and feeling very fit. I've just come back from a swim. Four of us went to the beach after we cleaned our rifles and Lewis Guns, and it was most refreshing.

I didn't do the best on the range today. Off one round I got 25 out of 25, and off another 2 out of 25. It was up and down all day. Our rifles are brand new, and by the devil can they kick. I've never known a 303 to kick like them.

It's mail day again tomorrow, Sweet, so I'll close till then.

*Lots of love and kisses  
NED*

3.8.1940 – Here I am back again, Sweet Heart, and still no letters from you. I received one from Mum this morning and she said you had written to her a couple of times. Her letter was posted on the 28th July. So, Darling, I don't know what's happened. You haven't found anyone you like better, have you? It seems slightly like it.

In Mum's letter this morning she says Clive has gone into camp at Grovely. I wish he hadn't. It's bad enough to have one in the family fool enough to join the army. Don't you think so, Darling?

Well, Sweet, how do you like the photos? I suppose you have them by now. Mum said she sent them to you.

Dawn, I'm closing now and I mightn't write again till I hear from you. There is nothing to write about except to tell you how much I love you and that won't fill a page, will it, my Sweet.

**Below:** Ned at Darwin. "Our rifles are brand new, and by the devil can they kick. I've never known a 303 to kick like them."  
[Ned, NF12, 1940]



*All my Love & Kisses  
To my Adorable Sweet Heart  
From Ned.*



*QX 3199, 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF  
Darwin NT  
Friday, 9 August 1940*

## *A puppy with two tails*

MY DEAREST DAWN – I received your so-called ‘mad’ letter today and was very pleased to get it. Nearly as pleased as a puppy with two tails. One thing I’ll say about it, you were truthful when you said it was a mad letter. Enough said. Anyway, I was mighty relieved to get it. Not to receive letters up here, Sweet Heart, would send a man mad in quick time. Down there you can at least go out to friends and into town or different functions, but up here there’s nowhere to go and we know no one except the boys in our battalion. We only get certain nights off, and then there is sure to be some duty awaiting you, or, if not that, some night stunt to go on. We work up to 1330 every day, then physical drill and swimming and other sports in the afternoon. Also, about every second night, three hours’ work in the dark to get used to moving about in darkness.

Darling, you want to know what I’d say about you going to dances. Well, Darling, that’s up to you. You can go out if you want to. I won’t mind. In a way, you should go out. You mightn’t ever see me again and I wouldn’t like to think, or have other people thinking, that you missed out on what a girl should enjoy at your age, Sweet Heart, just because you loved a boy who was fool enough to join up and get killed. So, go out and enjoy yourself and don’t worry over me. What’s to be will be, and all the worrying and crying won’t stop it. Also, Darling, if you meet some boy you like better than me, I don’t want you to be a martyr and keep true to me when you would rather have him. But for all that, no matter what happens, I want you to write to me, darling Dawn. I don’t want you to misunderstand what I’ve just written and think I don’t care anymore, because, Sweet Heart, I love you as nothing else on earth.

Just at present I’m writing this on the beach. We all have to come down each afternoon for drill. I’m not supposed to be where I am (hiding behind a rock lying in the sand) but out on the beach drilling with the others.

Dawn, I have to go now to get dressed. It’s a pity to leave down here. It’s nice and cool, and if I stayed I could write a couple of pages more.

*Love NED*

10.8.1940 – Darling, I’m just back to finish this letter off as I can’t write any more today. It’s our sports carnival and I’ll be going flat out. I’m entered in a drill team, amongst other things, and so we have to go out and drill. That means, of course, everything has to be just so-so: rifles and boots and things like that.

The mail closes at 12 o’clock and I want to send this apology of a letter, Sweet Heart. Anyway, I’ll write again tonight to make up for it.

Darling, thank you very much for the card. It’s the nicest present I’ve received for a long time and I do hope what it says is true, Sweet Heart.

So long, Darling, and good hunting at the dances.

*Lots of love  
NED*

**Below:** Ned at Darwin.  
[Ned, NF94, 1940]



*Address your next letter  
to Darwin N.T. I think  
it will get here quicker.  
Love Ned.*

*QX 3199, 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin  
Saturday, 10 August 1940*

MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Well, I'm back again, Darling, and the sports are only a memory. Our drill team is in the lead so far, but there are still two more teams to judge so we won't know if we have beaten the lot till about a week. The Lieut in charge of the team shouted us a bottle of beer each, and it was welcome, too, after 15 minutes standing perfectly still, the only movements being our hands shifting the rifle from one position to another.

Anyway, they'll never kid me into another drill team on our sports day, because it turned out that all my events clashed with the judging of the drill teams so I couldn't take part in any of them. Our CSM had to find a substitute for all my events. It was a rotten shame because we would have had a good chance of winning the whole sports, instead of coming third and only 10 points behind the winners, just because they thought I could drill better than most.

Dawn, I got some films printed up here but they didn't turn out the best otherwise I would send you some. Anyway, Sweet, next time I see you I'll leave the album with you – as long as you leave all the snaps in their place and don't take them out because you don't like who they are of, Darling.

Everything is very quiet up here tonight. Most of the boys have gone into town and the rest are nearly all in bed. I suppose there will be a bit of row kicked up when they start coming home again. There generally is.

Oh, something I forgot to tell you. If we win – that is if we beat the two teams that have still to be judged – the drill team (about 16 men) wins a case of beer. So, Darling, we'll have quite a spree, eh. What says you, my Sweet?

Darling, I just had a brainwave. I got my camera out and asked one of the boys to take me writing. I don't know if it will be any good as it was a time exposure, the first I've ever tried, and there are only a couple of electric lights near my bed. Anyway, I'm hoping for the best. I've got a box to write on tonight. It's the first time I've written a letter sitting up since I've been here, Darling.

Well, Precious, it's Sunday tomorrow and we don't have to get up till 7 o'clock. Hurray! I'm going to lie on the beach tomorrow and enjoy myself. Also do a bit of studying.

We've just received word up here that a few of the boys in the canteen below are drunk, so we can expect a bit of row when they come up to bed. I suppose this "up here" and "below" have got you guessing, Darling. Well, it's this way: there are three storeys in parts of Vestey's and two in others. We happen to sleep on the second floor and the canteen is on the ground floor. Now you'll understand, my Love.

So, your father wants to know if I have run any gins down yet. Well, you tell him no. Not yet anyway. By the time we do a day's work here, you have no surplus energy to chase any gins. Anyway, you get fined about £50 – and you may catch something a damn sight worse – if you consort with them.

And as for me being grumpy when I don't get a letter – well, I consider myself entitled to be. They are very essential up here, Dawn.

Well, my Love, it's time I signed off. They've started arriving – the drunks I mean. Goodnight and pleasant dreams. All my love and kisses to my darling Sweet Heart.

*From yours ever truly  
Ned*

*Darling. Its taken 1½ hrs to write this letter. So, Darling, think of the time I spend thinking of you. Matters of fact. Im all ways thinking of you Sweet Heart. I love you as much.  
lots of love, from  
your Soldier's Boy.  
Ned. x x*

**Opposite:** "Anyway, Sweet, next time I see you I'll leave the album with you – as long as you leave all the snaps in their place and don't take them out because you don't like who they are of, Darling."

Ned teasing Dawn about an album page of other girls.  
Sixty years after Ned wrote the letter, the snaps were still in their place in the album.  
[Ned, NF44, 1940]

**Below:** Ned writing a letter to Dawn in his Darwin hut.  
"I got my camera out and asked one of the boys to take me writing. I don't know if it will be any good as it was a time exposure."  
[Ned, NF21, 1940]









*QX 3199, 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin  
Friday, 16 August 1940*

MY DARLING DAWN – Well, Precious, I received two letters from you on our last mail day. At first I couldn't really believe my eyes. It was quite a shock. Dearest, you will keep up the good work, won't you? Please? It's our mail day again tomorrow, also our payday, and I'm hoping very much for some more letters.

Today was the first day I've had on parade this week as I've been Mess Orderly and I haven't had much time to do anything, let alone write, Sweet Heart. As it is, I haven't much time now. There's a night stunt on tonight, and I'm on town picquet tomorrow night. Saturday night I'm going to the pictures with some of the boys, and Sunday afternoon our 16 Platoon goes out about 6 miles and camps there till Thursday. There's only one hut and it's not very big. Also, we have to take a cook with us so we don't starve. It really is just a diversion from training – we have to make a road. There's a certain area allotted to each platoon to clear a road and we start Monday morning. The worst of the whole thing is that the CWA is holding a picnic in the botanical gardens for the AIF so as they can make the acquaintance of the men and invite some of us out to their homes. And we can't go because we leave here just after it starts. (Did I hear you say you're glad I can't go because I might meet some nice girls?)

Our 'D' company is supplying a concert next Sunday week and I'm on the committee as representative for 16 Platoon. I've got to round up all the talent in our platoon and help organise the program; and now, as we won't be here next week, I'll have to get the artists to rehearse out on the job. I've just come back from the first meeting and we have enough items to put over a fair program. All the same, on my own I'll have a fair bit of my time cut out to get rehearsals organised. The prize for the best concert put on by a company is a case of beer, so if we win the drill teams and the concert – well, you can guess the rest. The Red Cross nurses come out each Sunday night to hear the talent of the 2/15th Battalion, so the boys of 'D' Company are sure to do their best – at least they ought to.

Well, my Love, I'll have to go and get my supper if I want any, so I'm closing now. And I won't have time to write more afterwards as we have to get ready for the stunt tonight. Goodnight, Sweet Heart. I hope you sleep well and dream of the one who loves you best.

*Love NED*

18.8.1940 – Well, Sweet Heart, another day is nearly gone. The news, and it's pretty reliable this time, is that we can be prepared for a long stay. Also, we are going to be issued with more shorts and shirts, and also shoes this time. The shoes suggest, all by themselves, that we are here for keeps as they're a regular issue for the DMF and permanent forces in Darwin.

We are staying for the CWA picnic on Sunday after all. The orders are that we will go out road clearing on Monday morning now. Also, the following Monday, 'Don' Company is going out to a new camp (11-Mile Camp), so we will see a bit of new country for a change.

Dearest, I received another very loving letter from you this morning, also one from my sister. I was that happy after getting your letter and Marj's that I didn't care what I did, and the CSM put me on the crime sheet charged with smoking on parade. Kind of him, wasn't it, my Sweet.

We are going on parade now for a foot bath and then our pay. So, long till I come back...

DARLING, I'm going to read your last three letters to see if you want some questions answered, which I suppose you do. About Scotty, Darling: you can write to him if you want to. I can't stop you if you take it into your head to write. So, Dearest, you do what you think best. And the moustache, Sweet Heart, I've had one ever since I left you last. That photo of me was taken in the militia the last night before we broke camp from Frasers. The boys in the militia reckoned they were going to shave it off, and the boys with me up here have said the same, but it still survives and I'm keeping it on till I meet you again, Darling.

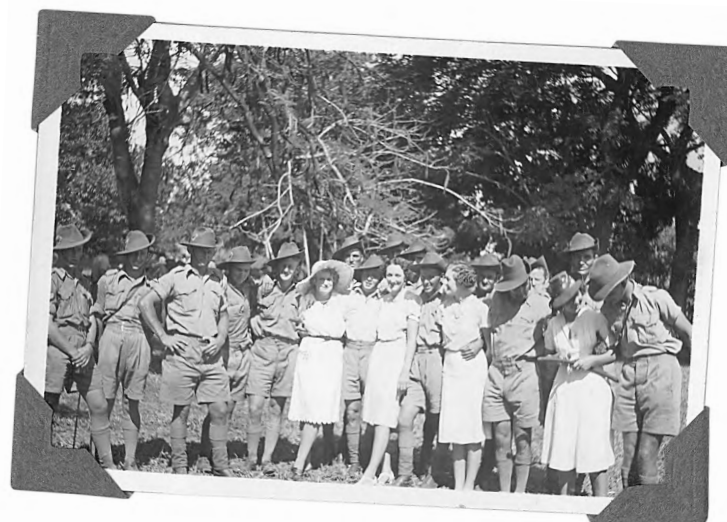
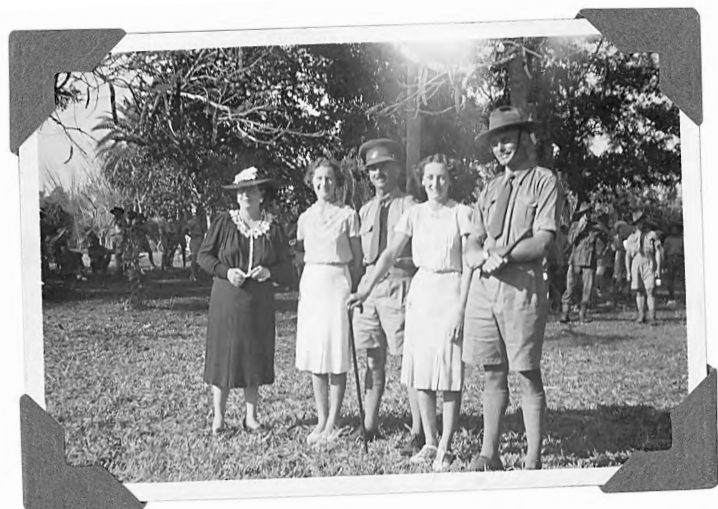
You certainly want to know a lot, my Love. Why we are called 'Don' Company is to distinguish 'D' Company from 'C' and 'B' Companies, as they sound so much alike. So we are recognised by 'Don'. Are you satisfied now about it, my sweet Love.

And what my mother did when she was a girl: well, I'm not sure, but I think she worked at Cribbe and Foote at Ipswich as a seamstress or some damn thing like that. Anyway, why not ask her?

I want to tell you how much I love you, Darling, so I've gone one extra page. And when I come back on leave, if we ever get such a thing, we are getting married. Do you get that? Think about it, Sweet Heart.

I'll have to close now as I've got to get ready for town picquet soon. Goodnight, my Love, and may everything you wish come true.

*Lots of love and kisses  
NED*





QX 3199

'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn

AIF, Darwin

Saturday, 24 August 1940

MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – I'm sorry I haven't written any letters the last week, but with the party and concert on Sunday, and then shifting out to this place on Monday, I haven't had time to.

The CWA party went off okay. Everyone enjoyed themselves, or if they didn't it was their own fault.

Yesterday we were fixing up the camp and making everything shipshape. We have one hut and two tents for 36 men. One section of 10 men camp in each tent, and the other 16 camp in the hut, including me.

This morning was the first time we worked on the road. We have only four hundred yards to clear and we go back on Friday, so we expect to have a day or so holiday as there is not much rubbish to remove. We march out and back each day, 2 miles each way, so we have to be up at 5.30 and it's still dark then.

Darling, I got one of your letters yesterday just before I left and I was very pleased to hear that you were managing everything okay.

[continued over page]



**Above:** Ned's 46th letter to Dawn, received by her on 29 August 1940.

**Opposite:** The CWA picnic in the Botanic Gardens. Lt. Col. Marlan is the man in the centre of the left photo. He was captured by the Germans during the Benghazi Handicap (see *Sunday, 6 April*, p117). Major Barton is on the right. [Ned, NFA02, 1940]

**Below:** Don Company's roadmaking camp. Ten men camped in each tent. Ned and 15 others were in the hut. [Ned, NF38, 1940]





Well, Sweet Heart, our camp here at Dripstone Caves is the best place we have been to so far. It's got everything one wants: a good beach, great for swimming and also fishing, and it's fairly picturesque. One other thing is that we can go about clad only in bathing trunks. There is only our own officer with us and he's one of "the boys". He's the best officer in the battalion and the most liked by everyone.

My Love, excuse all this scribble as I'm lying on the sand out on the beach writing this. I can't write at night as we only have one lantern for the hut. There's not much news and the tide's coming in, so I'll have to scale the cliffs to get out of my position. I'm going for a swim as soon as the rest of the boys come down.

Darling, I'm going to ask you something. Would you marry me and come up to Darwin if we were stationed here for keeps? You see, if we are staying here we might get leave about Christmas. So what says you?

My Love, the boys have arrived and by the sound of things they are well-primed and ready for a bit of fun. So, till I come back here again.

*Goodnight, Sweet Heart and lots of love  
from NED*

SWEET HEART, here I am back again. I've received another letter from you by boat. That's three letters from you unanswered: two by boat and one by air. I'm sorry, Sweet Heart, but it can't be helped. Also, I don't know just when this letter will go. It can't be posted before Friday as that's when we go to Vestey's again.

The Colonel inspected our barracks today and the strip of road we were working on. He expressed himself very pleased with everything.

Three of us walked out to the road last night to take some beer and smokes to the two chaps left there to guard the tools; and this morning I took a snap of the platoon in front of the last tree on our strip. Most of us were clad only in shorts and it should be a good photo.

There have been two ships in here the last week. One of them brought our motor transport up – about eight Chev utilities.

Darling, I've got a darn wisdom tooth coming through and by hell it's sore. I'm feeling very miserable about it, and tired too, so I'm closing this letter and wishing you the best of everything.

*From your ever-loving Soldier Boy  
NED*





P.S. Sweet Heart, thanks a lot for the wattle<sup>1</sup>. I had nearly forgotten what it looked like. I'm beginning to wish you were up here. I love you so much, Sweet, that I go lie on the beach and just think of you.

*Goodnight, Sweet Heart*  
Love NED

1. Dawn sent Ned a sprig of wattle for Wattle Day, celebrated on September 1st. The first Wattle Day was in 1910. During World War 1, wearing wattle on the first day of spring symbolised home for Australian forces serving overseas. After the war, Wattle Day lost some of its patriotic associations, and during the 1920s and 30s became a day for school children to plant trees. Dawn probably remembered Wattle Day from her time at school – and may have known of the day's patriotic symbolism – and so sent her Soldier Boy a sprig of wattle.

**Opposite:** "The Colonel inspected our barracks today and the strip of road we were working on. He expressed himself very pleased with everything."

Ned's platoon clearing a road. The man on the left is pulling (by rope) what appears to be a rubbish-filled wheelbarrow pushed by the man on the right.

[Ned, NF39, 1940]

**Below:** "Three of us walked out to the road last night to take some beer and smokes to the two chaps left there to guard the tools, and this morning I took a snap of the platoon in front of the last tree on our strip. Most of us were clad only in shorts and it should be a good photo."

No 16 Platoon, 'D' Company, beside the last tree on their section of road. This photo, including the names of the men, appears on page 20 of *Let Enemies Beware*.

[Ned, NF41, 1940]



**Don't think you own me  
body and soul because  
I'm in love with you**

G.X.3199: D. Gay. 2/15 Bn A.I.F.  
Darwin N.T. 25.8.40

Dearest Dawn.

I received your last letter last Friday when we arrived back from our 4 days bivouac at Drupstone Camp. I might say I wasn't too pleased with it either, you

seemed all "het up" about everything in general. Regarding beer: well, my Love, I've never been drunk or even merry since I last saw you. Matter of fact, three or four drinks is the most I've had in one day since then.

I'm just as good as anybody down there or up here – you included. And as for the boys with me: every man in the AIF is worth two of any man outside of it. They are the pick of Australia. They are willing to give their lives so you are kept safe, and you get wild and say that I'm as good as a liar and a drunk and that they are too. Your whole letter makes me disgusted, and if you do what you say you will – break it off – well, I hope my battalion goes into action quick. That will be all I ask from anyone.

Dawn, if you want to act like a fool I can't stop you. Just get this before you go off pop: I'm not married to you yet. Don't think you own me body and soul because I'm in love with you, and don't think all you have to do is to say the word and I'll jump to it, because that's altogether unreasonable. If you think carefully you will see it too.

There's one thing your last letter made me think about. I'm beginning to wonder if you love me as much as you say you do. Or are you only in love with Love? It seems a bit like it.

Dawn, you know I love you. If you want to break it off, well, I will still love you; I will just feel gut-wrenchingly sorry you didn't love me enough to wait.

Well, Darling, I'm sorry if I've hurt you by what I've written so far, but it's only half as potent as what I first thought when I read your letter. Sweet Heart, I don't suppose I can really blame you for getting wild about me drinking, but the thing is, I don't really do much of it. I certainly have a glass now and then, but it wouldn't amount to any more than about eight glasses a week. I can't be altogether a hermit. It's bad enough to be up here in Darwin, Sweet Heart, without getting into trouble with you – and with the boys as well. Don't forget I have to live, work, play, and in time, maybe fight and die beside them. Can I say no to whatever they suggest? I meet them halfway and they do the same with me. Please, Darling, forget all about it if you love me, and forgive me if you think I'm in the wrong.

A hospital ship came in yesterday and some of our boys are going back south on her, lucky devils. Our concert is on tonight and they shanghaied me into a part this morning, so I'm hoping everything turns out well.

We leave here for 11-Mile Camp on the 27th. We will miss our swims as it's inland from here and there are no waterholes nearby. But there is a football ground and we have a team picked already. I'm playing on the wing so I will have something to help occupy my time. We don't know how long we are going to stay there. About three or four weeks, I suppose. The more moves we get the better for us, I guess.

I got a letter from my brother, Clive, on Friday and he doesn't care much for the army. He's in the Field Engineers at Grovely<sup>1</sup>.

Well, Love, I hope everyone at Monto is okay. I'll have to close as we are having a dress rehearsal at 2 o'clock and it's 15 minutes to go.

Hoping you still love me & have forgiven me  
for the start of this letter.

I Remain

Yours ever loving  
D. Gay.

+ + + +  
+ + + +  
+ + + +  
+ + + +

1. A military training camp in the Brisbane suburb of Grovely.



*QX 3199, 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF  
Darwin, NT  
Friday, 30 August 1940*

DARLING DAWN – I received your ever-welcome letter today, just before we started on our march through Darwin. I was very pleased to get it and also the postcard. It was rather nice. Our march today was awful. Everything possible that could go wrong did so, and it was rather a mess up all through.

Well, Dearest, we moved to our camp at the 11-Mile last Tuesday and it's a lot better than Vestey's. The only thing wrong is that there is no swimming, but our barracks are great. It really belongs to the navy. It's a navy wireless station. There are seven aerials, all about 100 feet high, so you can guess how big the station itself is. We are carrying out a fair few night manoeuvres while we are here.

We mounted our first guard last night and I was on it. Talk about mosquitoes. They nearly carried us away they were that bad.

Darling, there's talk of us leaving Darwin about the 21st September. As far as we know it's only a rumour. We might leave at any time, and then again we might stay here for keeps. As it is, we don't know what is happening or is likely to happen, so don't rely on anything I might say because nothing is really known about what we are to do.

Well, Darling, about my last letter. I'm sorry for some of the things I said. But Dawn, try to understand will you, that it's a totally different life in the army than in civilian life. It's not possible that you can really understand how everything is, especially here in Darwin.

You say in your last letter, Precious, that you might have been bossy in your letter. Well, you were, and if you think hard enough you will find more marriages are broken up because the wife is too bossy than through the husband drinking. I've told you the amount of beer I drink is harmless. As it is, we can drink beer only at certain hours, but we can gamble anytime. It's our pay day today and two of the boys in the room are already broke through gambling. So, Sweet Heart, you should be pleased I don't gamble. I've got enough willpower to keep away from gambling, so surely you can trust me enough to keep off the drink.

My Precious, I always thought a girl loved a man for what he was, faults and all. Maybe I'm asking a lot after my last letter, but you made me wild and I just couldn't help myself.

Well, Darling, if you don't think what I say in this letter is reasonable, maybe it would be best to do what you say and break it off. I can't change my mind, or the way I live, anymore than you can, Darling. I'm hoping you will see the reasonability of this and keep on like before. I love you and always have since I first met you.

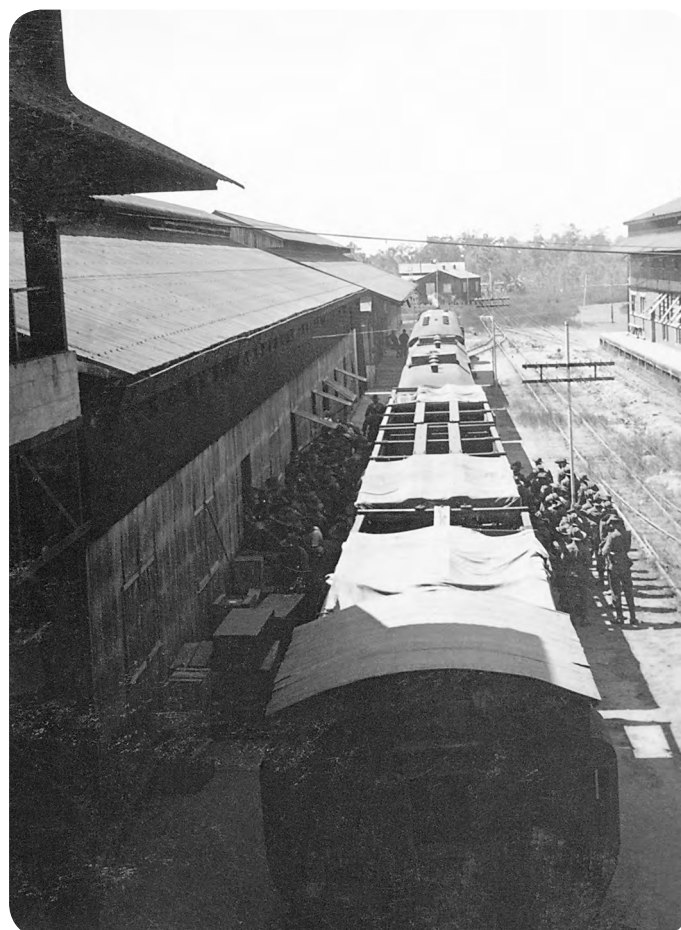
Oh, by the way, we came out here by train. It's the first train ride any of us have had since we left Queensland, so it was a bit of a sensation.

I'm closing now, Sweet Heart. Goodnight and think it over well, Precious. You know what I want you to say, Love.

*I remain your ever-loving Soldier Boy  
NED*

**Top:** Some of the Soldier Boys of Ned's platoon at the hut at 11-Mile camp.  
"Well, Dearest, we moved to our camp at the 11-Mile last Tuesday and it's a lot better than Vestey's. The only thing wrong is that there is no swimming, but our barracks are great. It really belongs to the navy. It's a navy wireless station."  
[Ned, NF34, 1940]

**Bottom:** Train leaving Vestey's for 11-Mile Camp.  
"Oh, by the way, we came out here by train. It's the first train ride any of us have had since we left Queensland, so it was a bit of a sensation."  
[Ned, NF35, 1940]



*QX 3199, 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin NT  
Tuesday, 3 September 1940*

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – I received your very precious letter yesterday. It was one of the nicest letters I've had from you, ever, Dearest. I suppose you have got that rotten letter I sent to you. I'm sorry. Please don't be too hard on me. Let's forget all of that.

Well, Darling, they are getting pretty hard on us now. They made us march 6 miles to church last Sunday – 3 miles there and three back. Weren't we crooked. The best of it was: the boys were making a bit of noise the night before, singing and so on, and our 2IC shut them up and sent them back to their huts. So, with orders not to sing the night before, and the 6-mile march, not any of our company sang at the church service. There were only 26 other men there, so you can guess what a farce it turned out to be.

I was on guard all Sunday night and Monday and I'm still pretty tired. We will get guard every three nights now, worse luck. Also, there is a night march tonight. I hope they don't want us to go too far because I'll crack up if they do.

Some of the boys and our Lieut wanted me to go up to some jungle country this afternoon, but I decided to write to you instead.

There's a plain just behind our camp called Cemetery Plains because it has anthills all over it in rows. Some of them are over 12' high and 12' wide and only 2' 6" thick and their edges point directly north-south. They are called magnetic anthills and they are something you wouldn't see anywhere else in a lifetime.

Dearest, three of us went to Darwin last Saturday night and saw *Dawn Patrol*. I saw it once in Brisbane and it's a great show. There's not a woman in it anywhere. We took a taxi and got up to a speed of 78 mph. Don't you try to beat that, Sweet Heart. Anyway, your old tub couldn't do it.

Well, Darling, there is nothing else to tell you. We are still hoping to go back on the 21st. There's still talk of it. I'm praying we do, but I won't believe it till we get on the boat. I can't see them sending us back south for a long time to come. Anyway, I hope I'm wrong.

I suppose Mum told you she had a flat down at Wynnum Central somewhere. She said she would write to you again shortly.

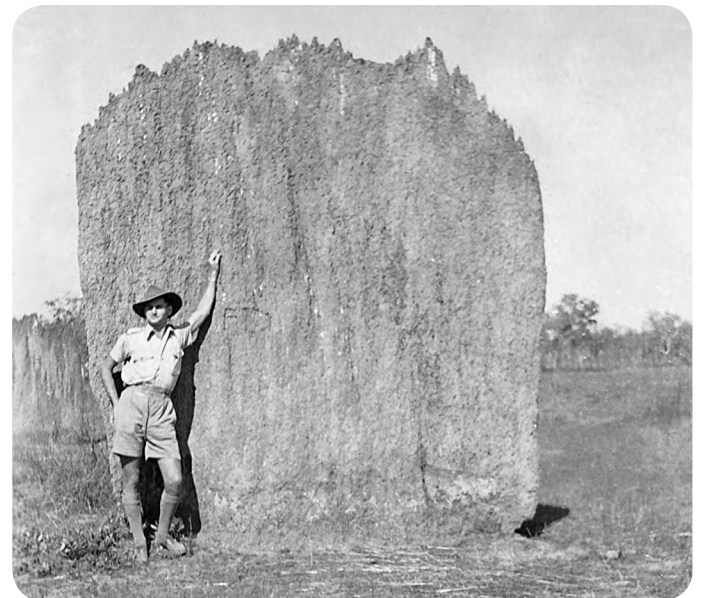
Well, Precious, I hope I see you soon. I'll have to close now. Lots of love and kisses for my darling Sweet Heart.

*From your ever-loving Soldier Boy  
NED*

P.S. Here's something. Have you ever tried goat's meat? We haven't been getting the best of tucker lately, so yesterday the cook told us if we caught some goats he would cook them for us. Well, we needed no second telling. It ended up with three goats disappearing and me having a good supper.

Dawn Darling, don't be insulted by that "don't think you own me" letter of mine and go back to Hardy. You have mentioned him a fair bit lately. I still love you, Sweet Heart, and want you. Darling, this has to be goodnight.

*Love from NED*





*QX 3199, 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin NT  
Tuesday, 10 September 1940*

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Well, Precious, I got a very nice surprise yesterday. Two letters from you and it wasn't even our mail day. I can't think how it happened, but anyway I was very pleased to get them especially after I read their contents. The truth was: I was expecting you to go off the deep end when you received that letter from me, and I was rather dreading your reply. So you can realise how happy and relieved I am now, Darling.

Dawn Dearest, we are pretty certain that we will be back some time near the beginning of next month. We are leaving here on the 21st as far as we know. So, my Sweet, I think you can expect us this time.

By the way, Darling, did I tell you we had Major General Lavarack up here to see us last Friday. He is one of the big noises in the 7th Division. We were digging trenches at the time, so we didn't see much of him.

Well, Darling, there's not much news here. Matter of fact, there's none at present. There is no leave being granted and we get no papers to read. Anyway, even if we did we wouldn't have time to read them. We do a fair bit of work each day and we have only lanterns at night. There is no time for reading or writing.

Some of the navy are to take over a couple of the huts today, and the other platoon of 'D' Company goes out to Dripstone Caves tomorrow. From then on we will have to mount guard and do all the work around camp ourselves. We take it in turns at present.

Darling, I hope you haven't waited too long for this letter. I started it last Friday, but I was put on guard all Friday night and Saturday. Sunday I woke up with a devil of a headache. It's okay again now, thank God.

We are still running first in the concerts, but there's still another one to come off yet. I haven't seen the last two as we can't get leave to go anywhere now.

Well, Precious, you want to know if I would like you to stay in Brisbane. If you could get a job, Darling, I would say yes, do.

I've just got back from a game of cricket. It was either play or work, so I chose to play. Also, we have just had tea and there was some news that wasn't so hot. The boys at Vestey's got an issue of shorts and shirts today. Tropical dress they call it. That doesn't sound like leaving in a week or two, does it. Of course they might be giving it to us to get it off their hands. Let's hope so anyway.

I haven't heard anything from down home for quite a while now, so I hope they are all well. It was Mother's birthday on the 5th September.

Darling, if you really want to you can write to Scotty. I won't mind. Tell me next time what division and battalion he is in, and where he is training, because I might be able to look him up if I ever get anywhere he is.

Sweet Heart, I'll have to close as it's getting late. Goodnight Precious. Hoping all our dreams come true.

*I remain your ever-loving Soldier Boy  
Ned*

*QX 3199, 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin NT  
Saturday, 14 September 1940*

MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Well, Precious, you are getting very industrious lately. I received three letters this morning. It was quite a surprise. Darling, you might see me very soon, but don't build too many hopes on it because you never can tell what they are doing. Anyway, Sweet Heart, I'll wire you as soon as we hit Brisbane. We won't be allowed to write and tell you before we leave.

Last week here has been fairly interesting. Manoeuvres by day, mostly. We had an alarm go off one night this week and you should have seen the scatter. We were all in bed and there were tin hats, webbing<sup>1</sup> and rifles going all roads.

I pulled off the "best equipped" guard the other night, so I didn't have to mount with the rest of the boys. Smart boy, me, when I want to be.

We had our first Rugby League match yesterday. I played on the wing. Scored two tries and got knocked out near the end, but it's all in the game. We are playing again tomorrow afternoon.

We were paid a surprise visit by the Bren Gun carriers last night. Eight of them all told and they kicked up a hell of a row and a lot of dust.

Well, Dearest, I can't tell you much more. We are not allowed to divulge much now, so you will have to wait till I see you again. By the way, Darling, you will come down to Brisbane when I get back, won't you?

I'm going to close, Precious. It's as hot as the devil up here and it doesn't make letter writing altogether a great pleasure. Goodnight.

*Lots of love and kisses  
from yours forever, NED*

**Opposite:** Ned and the magnetic anthills. "There's a plain just behind our camp called Cemetery Plains because it has anthills all over it in rows."  
[Ned, NF31, NF32, 1940]

**Below:** Bren Gun carrier near Ned's hut. "We were paid a surprise visit by the Bren Gun carriers last night. Eight of them all told and they kicked up a hell of a row and a lot of dust."  
[Dawn, DF13, 1940]



1. Webbing: the sling on a rifle. See photo on p48.

## *They must be saving us for the Huns*

*QX 3199 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin, NT  
Monday, 16 September 1940*

MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Well, Darling, this is just a line to let you know I'm still alive and kicking. I found I wasn't doing anything for a while so I decided to drop you a line. At the present time I'm waiting to mount guard.

Precious, things are just the same as ever up here. We won our football game yesterday, 14 to 3. I didn't score any tries this time. The other platoon has challenged us to a game whenever we like. I suppose it will be sometime during this week. Anyway, I hope so. Rugby is the only game worth playing up here.

We got a ride to church parade this morning. They sent five of our transport lorries out for us, so our platoon decided to sing in church today.

Well, Sweet Heart, I'm going to finish for now. I'll wait and see if I get a letter from you tomorrow before sending this.

*Goodnight, darling Love  
NED*

I'M BACK AGAIN, Darling, and very tired. I've just come off guard. I've been on all night and day. We were supposed to play a football match this evening, so I went on two consecutive four-hour shifts to be finished guard in time, only to find out when I got back that one of the officers kicked up a bit of a fuss and wouldn't let his platoon play. I won't tell you what we called him. Not to his face, of course.

Anyway, we are thinking of getting a petition going so as to lift the ban on Rugby League. They say we might get hurt. Just think about it. We are in the AIF and they won't let us play football because we might get hurt. It's the best joke we've heard since we joined up. They must be saving us for the Huns. It makes me disgusted at some of the things they do.

Well, my Precious, we are going on a fair-size manoeuvre tomorrow. We don't know just where at present. The rest of our platoon went on a stunt at 0430 this morning. I used the little brains I have and stayed on guard, which is only tiring, instead of running round the countryside in the dark.

Well, Dearest, the mail hasn't arrived yet. It should be here anytime now unless the plane is late again.

It's getting dark now, Darling, so I'll have to close. Lots of love and kisses to my most precious Sweet Heart. Sweet dreams.

*From your's ever loving  
Soldier's Lover Ned.  
x x x x x  
h u n t*

*QX 3199 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin, NT  
Sunday, 22 September 1940*

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Well, Darling, I hope you accept my apologies for not writing sooner, but the fact is we have been doing so many different things lately it was impossible to even write one letter. Starting from Monday it has been the most hectic week since I first came into the army. First, we went on a battalion manoeuvre to Dripstone and slept out under the stars in the sand. Darling, when I say slept, that is certainly a mistake because being the Platoon Orderly or Runner (or to put it into a simpler form, a glorified message boy) I was awake all night running messages. Next morning we marched 2 miles back to 11-Mile Camp. I thought I would sleep for a week after it, but we were on our toes again next morning for a company manoeuvre, worse luck. And then, Sweet Heart, they had the hide to march us through Darwin to farewell half our battalion before they got on the boat. We were left behind, naturally. We don't know what destination they are headed for, Sweet, but we are expecting to follow soon.

We moved into Vestey's again today, and marvel of marvels we have beds to sleep on. Hurray! But for all that, they slipped one over us and put 16 Platoon on inlying picquet<sup>1</sup>. We always get something to do no matter where we are.

Darling, you say you want me to come to Monto on leave and bring you down. I will if I can, but the army doesn't ask you where you want to go on leave – they just give you a free rail pass to where you joined up from. I'll see just what can be done about it, Precious.

Well, Darling, I just can't seem to get in a decent-enough mood for letter writing. There's always some fatigue party on, and, sure as the devil, I get picked as soon as I start to write. Just at present the letters have piled up and I've got seven to answer. Everyone seems to write at the same time.

By the way, Dearest, I got a letter from a girl in Maryborough a couple of days ago. I don't know her and she doesn't know me. She is a friend of the mother of one of my best pals from school. Anyway, she wrote to me and they have sent a parcel but I haven't received it yet. I hope you are not jealous, Sweet Heart. You know I love you still, my Sweet.

Well, Dearest, I'm going to switch off. I can't think of any more news and at the same time think of you, too, Darling.

*To my loving Dawn  
from yours ever truly, NED*

P.S. The other platoon is squealing about us getting beds, so they're trying to chuck our beds out. Our platoon, they are that wild they are calling the other platoon for everything.

*Good Night, Darling  
Love Ned*

1. Inlying picquet: guard duty in camp.





**Left & right:** Ned at Darwin.  
[Ned, NF95, NF96, 1940]



**Below:** Clothes washing at Vestey's.  
[Ned, NF37, 1940]





*QX 3199 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin, NT  
Thursday, 26 September 1940*

MY ADORABLE SWEET HEART – Thanks, Darling, for your last letter. I was very glad to get it. I was feeling in a rotten mood and it helped me to get over it. We haven't been so busy this last week and I'm gradually catching up on my correspondence. All the same, I hope no one but you writes for a while.

Well, Darling, everything is just the same here. We still don't know when we leave. I hope it's soon. Also, it's pretty certain we go back to Redbank.

Ten of us were put on a fatigue party this morning to clean seven stoves and grease them, so as to store them away. After a while we found that we couldn't keep clean, and by the time we'd finished we'd had about half a dozen grease fights and were covered from head to toe in grease. Then it took half the afternoon to get clean again. One of the boys took a photo, so now we are waiting to see how it turns out.

Well, my Precious, dinner parade is now about to take place, so I'll leave you till after...

DARLING, dinner's over. Fare wasn't as bad tonight, but I would give a lot for a decent cup of tea now and again.

We go out to the rifle range again Friday for another shoot and I hope I do a bit better than the last time (93 out of 150).

Honey, I wish I was down there with you instead of living way up here. We never thought we would be so far apart, ever, did we Sweet Heart. I love you and still want to marry you, but it looks as if we will have to elope. Would you be game?

Darling, I'll have to close as this is my last page.

*Lots of love and kisses to my darling Dawn  
from yours ever, NED*

P.S. Thanks for enclosing Scotty's letter [opposite], but there was no need to do that. You can write to him if you want to. I don't mind, Sweet Heart. I'm enclosing it back to you with this letter.





A.W. Scott  
2/1st MAC<sup>1</sup>

Redbank Camp

QX 6826

26-8-40

Dear Mabel,

Just a few lines to let you know that I have not forgotten you. I hope you are doing well and all the rest of the family are the same. I believe your father and Mrs Lewis were down in Brisbane for the Show but I did not happen to meet them, but I don't think it will be long before I am coming up to Monto way, soon I hope, and I will come down and see you all then. I don't suppose you are married yet. I have been in Camp about 12 weeks now and I am just about sick of it Mabel but I cannot give a week's notice now like I could on a farm. I am very sorry I ever left your place. I wish I was back there over and over again. I hope you will answer this letter. I wrote about 3 weeks ago, but Cyril<sup>2</sup> was in Brisbane I suppose. There is not much to write about so I will close now. Wishing you and all, the best of luck and happiness.

I remain your  
friend, Scotty.

1. MAC: Motor Ambulance Convoy

2. Cyril was Dawn's father. Dawn would have had to obtain permission from her father before she could write to Scotty.

**Opposite:** Nine lads of 'D' Company on a fatigue party cleaning stoves. Ned second from left.

"...so by the time we finished we had about half a dozen grease fights and were covered from head to toe in grease."

[Ned, NF42, 1940]

ERNEST J. HAREWOOD  
Lt.-Commissioner

QUEENSLAND HEADQUARTERS  
167 ANN STREET, BRISBANE

RED SHIELD HUTS-HOSTELS

at W. Scott  
2/1st MAC  
Redbank Camp.

No. QX 6826  
Unit 2/1st MAC.

PATRON—RT. HON. Wm. M. HUGHES, P.C.

FOR AUSTRALIAN TROOPS

Redbank. Camp  
26/8. 1940

Dear Mabel

Just a few lines to let you know that I have not forgotten you. I hope you are doing well and all the rest of the family are the same. I believe your father and Mrs Lewis were down in Brisbane for the Show but I did not happen to meet them, but I don't think it will be long before I am coming up to Monto way, soon I hope, and I will come down and see you all then. I don't suppose you are married yet. I have been in Camp about 12 weeks now and I am just about sick of it Mabel but I cannot give a week's notice now like I could on a farm. I am very sorry I ever left your place. I wish I was back there over and over again. I hope you will answer this letter. I wrote about 3 weeks ago, but Cyril<sup>2</sup> was in Brisbane I suppose. There is not much to write about so I will close now. Wishing you and all, the best of luck and happiness.

I remain your  
friend, Scotty.

**Above:** Scotty's letter to Dawn (he called her Mabel). Scotty had worked on the Monto farm after Ned left, but felt the patriotic urge, as most young men did, and enlisted on 3 June 1940.

Dawn sent Scotty's letter to Ned to get permission to write a reply to Scotty, but of course there was little need for Dawn to do that. All soldiers were acutely aware of the importance of receiving letters – it didn't really matter from whom as long as it was from a girl – and Ned's permission was given unstintingly.

On the back of Scotty's letter Dawn wrote a note

to Ned. The kisses at the end of the note can be seen running vertically above the word "Dear":

*Have decided to send Scotty's letter. Please yourself about sending it back, Honey. xxxxxx.*

Ned did send back Scotty's letter. He included it with his letter of 26 September 1940 and that's the reason it has survived – Dawn kept everything she ever received from Ned. Unfortunately, apart from the note on the back of Scotty's letter above, Dawn's side of the correspondence is no longer in existence.

*QX 3199 'Don' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin NT  
Sunday, 29 September 1940*

MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Just a line, Darling, to let you know we haven't left yet, although we hope to be leaving very soon. I haven't heard from you the last two mail days and I'm beginning to wonder if you are sick or something has happened down there. It's not like you to stop writing so suddenly. Please let me know just what is wrong, Darling, and if it's my fault I'll do my best to rectify it, Honey.

I received a letter from Mother last mail day and she says she is going to ask you down when I come back. Sweet Heart, please accept and come down. I'll be there waiting for you if I land first.

They are talking of calling for volunteers to stay behind for a fortnight after the others leave. Darling, you don't mind if I stay behind, do you, Sweet? The longer I stay the more cash we will have to spend when we meet.

Well, Dearest, it's very hot up here still. Two of 'Don' Company are in the guard hut for being drunk and disorderly. They are being held for trial.

Three of us went to Darwin yesterday afternoon and had a look round. It's very quiet now since the rest of the battalion left last week. There are three boats in just at present. There is a rumour that we will go back on one of them, but it's hardly likely. We finished up at the pictures but they weren't so hot. Not as good as their usual program.

Well, Darling, I can't think of any more to tell you. All the boys are either playing cards, two-up, or writing. We are having another concert here tonight and I, for one, hope it's the last.

Darling, I have to close as I've run completely out of news. So, adios, Sweet Heart. Give my love to all down there and look after yourself.

Here's lots of love to you, Sweet Heart.

*From your ever-loving  
Soldier Sweet Heart*

P.S. DARLING, we had a rotten day on the range last Friday. Over half the platoon failed. I got 98 out of 250 and there were a lot under me. The highest was 157, so you see everyone was bad. Some were awful, including me.

*Lots of love, Ned*

*QX 3199 'Don' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin NT  
Friday, 4 October 1940*

DEAREST DAWN – I received your loving letter today. I certainly thought you had forgotten me as I didn't get a letter from you for two mail days. Our mail days are changed here now, so it was quite a surprise to come in this morning and find a letter waiting.

Well, Darling, this letter may not be as long as you would like it to be because 'Don' Company were out on a stunt all last night. We left here (Vestey's) at 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon and marched out to the 11-Mile Camp. There we had dinner and took up positions for the night. Talk about mosquitoes – if you went to sleep, by the time you woke up again they had shifted you to a different place. There were that many of them, and they were so big, that they had no trouble in carrying you around.

So much for the stunt, Darling. The only time we enjoyed anything to do with it was when they said we could have this morning off, which was very kind of them indeed.

Darling, 16 Platoon is on security guard at the wharf and several other spots for three days. The section I happened to be detailed to was put in reserve, so we are still at Vestey's. The other two sections are in Darwin on duty. The cause of us being put on security guard is that the wharf lumpers have gone on strike. The latest news is that it will be all over by 1 o'clock tomorrow.

Precious, I can't think of any more news. I guess this place has got me down. I don't care a damn what happens now. If only we could get a bit of action, things might be okay.

By the way, Honey, don't lay any blame on the girl in Maryborough. She only wrote to me to oblige an old school pal's mother. My opinion, Darling, is that it was rather decent of her to write to a stranger and see if she could get him anything he wanted, which he couldn't get where we was. Don't forget, Darling, writing to a soldier and to a civilian are totally different. They have a very different aspect. Girls write to anyone on service, meaning to be useful and kind. It's hard to explain on paper and I hope you understand, Sweet Heart.

The latest news is that after 1 o'clock today, martial law is to be observed in Darwin. Things get more interesting as time goes on.

Sweet Heart, the boys are acting the goat and trying to cut each other's hair. They are making such a mess they're spoiling my letter writing. I've been trying to finish all morning, Darling, and it's nearly lunch time now. I'm afraid I'm a bit of a frost when it comes to writing letters. I like action better.

Darling, you must come down to Brisbane when I arrive back. Don't believe it when people say we won't get any leave, because there will be hell to pay if we don't. There won't be a 2/15th Battalion left. All the men will go wild – and God help anyone who tries to stop us.

Well, my Precious, I'll have to close. Things are very dead here in the barracks now. It's the first time we haven't had a battalion parade of a morning. Also, there's a rumour that we hand over Vestey's to another battalion in a week's time. Next Thursday to be exact.

Honey, keep on writing. If I don't get your letters here they will be sent on to the next stop.

*To Dawn, From your ever-loving  
Soldier Bay. Ned.*  
x x x x x  
x x x x x



*QX 3199 'Don' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF, Darwin NT  
Tuesday, 8 October 1940*

TO MY PRECIOUS DARLING – I haven't heard from you for quite a while now, so I've decided to drop you a line to let you know everything is okay with me here. We have finished our security guard. Another platoon took over our duties, though we would rather have carried on with them.

Darling, when we were on guard at the wharf a flying boat landed in from Singapore and left next morning for Brisbane. I was wishing, when I watched it take off, that I was aboard heading for you and home, Sweet Heart.



Well, Dawn, we are on picquet tonight and nearly all of us are dead tired. We were up early this morning and have been shovelling coal out of trucks all day. Because of the strike, the armed forces (all of them) have to unload the boats. Anyway, we enjoyed ourselves, although it was hard and dirty work. It's the first really hard work we have done, and it was quite a change from drill and manoeuvres, Sweet.

I think we go on a manoeuvre tomorrow, but I'm not sure. We were to go on a two-day stunt, but the strike put an end to that.

Darling, I hope you don't get any ideas in your head because this is only a one-page letter, but there is not any news and this is all the paper till pay day. They say our letters are getting censored now, so we must be leaving shortly.

*Sweet Heart, lots of love and kisses to you  
from yours ever truly, NED*

**Above:** "When we were on guard at the wharf a flying boat landed in from Singapore and left next morning for Brisbane."  
[Ned, NF29, 1940]

*QX 3199 'Don' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF  
Vestey's Barracks, Darwin NT  
Saturday, 12 October 1940*

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Darling, I received your loving letter two or three days ago and this is the first chance I've had of answering it. Our platoon has been on the duty list nearly every night this week. I started to write last night but we were on picquet and all I had time to do was address the envelope.

I went to the pictures Friday night and saw *The Texans*. It was worth seeing, too.

Well, Darling, there's no news. We are just doing the same work over and over again. I went out on the range Saturday for a re-shoot and wasn't much of a success. Only 119, six under a pass. I don't know whether they will shove us through or whether I'll have to shoot again. I don't know what's gone wrong lately, but everything I do is up to putty.

Dawn, Dearest, I'm just dying for a look at you. Darwin is so darn tiresome and I'm just fed up with it all. The strike is over now and everyone is back to their job again.

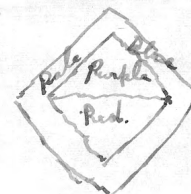
My Darling, this letter has to get into the Orderly Room before 3.30 and it's 3.10 now so I'll have to hurry. I hope you'll excuse me, Sweet Heart, but I'll write again in a day or so.

You wanted to know what our colours were, Precious. Well, it's purple over red on a pale blue background in the shape of a diamond.

I'll close now expecting to see you when we hit Brisbane, Love. Till we meet again, Dawn Sweet Heart, remember I love you.

*I remain yours for ever.  
Ned. x x x x x*

*Our colours & their shape.*



QX 3199 'Don' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF  
C/- GPO Brisbane  
Tuesday, 15 October 1940

TO MY DARLING DAWN – Well, Dearest, I said I would drop you another line in a couple of days, so here it is. I'll start off and tell you right away that there is no news. The only thing I can tell you is how much I love you, and that shouldn't be news, should it, my Love.

By the way, Sweet Heart, why don't you want me to see Scotty if I get to Brisbane before you? Have you got something to hide? Anyway, Darling, I won't see him and I hope you are in Brisbane before me. I'm just longing to get back to see you again.

They are talking of changing our battalion colours again, Darling. I only wrote and told you them last letter and now they say we are to have the old 15th Battalion colours, chocolate and blue on a grey background. It might be just talk, but I hope they don't because I spent a long time putting those patches on my uniform and I'd hate to sew some more on. There's also talk of the CWA giving us a farewell picnic in the gardens on Sunday. It will be a change for us if they do, and a pleasant one, too.

Darling, I'm sorry your father thinks I ought to come to Monto, but Sweet Heart, I have to go home and see my parents and stay there. They are getting old now and it wouldn't be right for me not to stay with them on my last leave, would it, Dawn.

Clive wants to transfer into my company from the 8th Division. He might have a good chance, too, but I don't know if it would be for the best to fight side by side. It would be pretty terrible to see your brother killed in an attack and have to leave him and go on without stopping.

Well, Dearest, things are looking brighter and I might see you in about three weeks' time. My Love, I'll close now. Lots of love and kisses to my darling Sweet Heart. Pleasant dreams and I hope they are of me.

*From your Ever Faithful  
Soldier Sweet Heart. Ned*  
x x x x x x x  
x x x x x

P.S. I always do kisses in a hurry because I don't like thinking of the ones I'm missing.

NED

QX 3199 'Don' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF  
C/- GPO Brisbane  
Tuesday, 22 October 1940

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Precious, I am very sorry to hear you are in hospital. I wish I was there to help keep you from getting lonely. I hope, Sweet Heart, you are not in for long. Please hurry up and get well again, won't you.

We got a lecture on censorship today, Sweet Heart, so I don't know just what to write about. We can't say what we are doing at present here. It's a damn nuisance.

We had a concert in our mess hut again last night and it was one of the best so far. I've got a poem that one of the boys put over and I'll show it to you when I see you. Its title is: *The Lament of the Lost Legion, 2/15 Bn*. It describes everything from Brisbane till now.

Darling, I'll write to your father tomorrow night. I haven't time tonight. I don't know just what I'll say to him. It will be the first time I've asked any girl's father permission to do anything, and it's got me slightly beat at just what I'll say.

Dawn Darling, I'm going to close. I can't write any more. I'll tell you everything that is interesting when next we meet, Sweet Heart.

*lots of love & kisses to my  
Adorable Sweet Heart.  
From your Ever Loving  
Ned.*  
x x x x x x x  
x x x x x x x

P.S. I'm going to write for your father's consent right away. Wish me luck, Darling, and I hope he doesn't get wild and go you about it.

Love NED

P.P.S. The boys have just sighted a boat on the horizon and they're going mad, me included. It might be the *Zealandia* (our boat)<sup>1</sup>. Anyway, here's hoping.

Love NED

1. The ship sighted on the horizon was indeed the *Zealandia*. Ned left Darwin in the *Zealandia* on the 29th October and arrived in Brisbane on the 7th November. The 2/15th Battalion moved into barracks at Redbank.



LAMENT OF THE LOST LEGION, 2/15 Battn.

Darwin  
1940.

There were no farewell kisses, no crowds to shout "Hurrah",  
Our last farewell to Brisbane, were the smells of Pinkenba,  
We sailed along the Ocean and anchored in a port,  
Our question "any chance of leave" was answered with a snort  
"Do you think you are on a holiday or a blinkin' pleasure trip",  
"Well, you're not, you lot of flamin' bums, you stay aboard the ship"  
So wistfully we lined the rails, so near and yet so far,  
Thinking of the Blondes, the Parties & the beer upon the Bar,  
We reckoned we were "tough guys", but if the truth be told,  
Only half of us were eating, down that dirty stinking hold,  
"Darwin" who can describe it, I will not write a line,  
I'll leave it to the brighter brains & a better pen than mine,  
The beer up here is "lousy", the price beyond one's means  
If it was'nt for the gins and chows, you'd swear you were in "Queens"  
They have tried us out at every job that's going in the place,  
You'd think that we were coolies, though we don't belong the race,  
They have had us cleaning rubbish & humping heavy loads,  
Guarding Wireless Stations, cleaning scrub & making roads,  
There's no fun in "Sentry Duty" when you guard a Wireless Pole,  
And to add insult to injury, they sent us shovelling coal, name  
They talked of growing vegetables, Australian Inland Farmer is our  
If they put us market gardening, we will hang our heads in shame,  
Our names (Menzie's Tourists & Marlow's Circus) even coal humpers  
And even now they talk of sending us to scab on the wharf lumpers,  
Then there is our lessons, games of pure pretence,  
If it isn't flamin' Scout Patrols, it's tactical defence,  
In the shade of the "Cascaara" then the battles on the plains  
Of sand fly bitten hides and blinkin' aches and pains  
Of mock skirmishes and battles and the tactics of the tanks  
The officer in hospital, Diagnosis - shot by blank  
They taught us everything I think, how to roll our kits up right  
We'll have to put a stop to it or they will teach us how to fight  
We are sick of bloomin' Darwin - hope they send us by a boat  
We don't care if it ain't classy as long as it will float  
A raft, a fleet of tin canoes a gun-boat or a Scow  
Or just a pair of water wings, for we'll get home some how  
Darwin may be a scenic spot, beauty it may not lack -  
If it is on an outbound boat on the stern rail looking back.





Above: The 61st letter from Ned to Dawn, received 28th November 1940.

Redbank Camp  
Tuesday, 26 November 1940

DEAREST SWEET HEART – I received the parcel and also your letter this morning. I was wondering whom it could have come from till I found the letter enclosed.

Well, Darling, I'll be down<sup>1</sup> on Friday night if everything goes well, so here's hoping. We were to get three days' leave this week from Thursday till Saturday, and Sunday till Tuesday, half of the company to go each time. We had our leave applications in and then they turned round and cancelled them and told us only 25 percent could get weekend leave. I'm trying to get off and I think it will be okay<sup>2</sup>.

Clive came to the hut today and told us exactly what he thought of Redbank.

Dearest, there certainly isn't any news, except there's more dust here than in the middle of the Sahara Desert. Hoping to see you soon, Darling. Give my love to Mum and Dad.

Lots of love to you Sweet Heart  
NED

P.S. Precious, this isn't much of a letter. It's just a note to tell you how much I love you, Sweet Heart, and that I miss you like the devil. I wish you were staying up here, Darling, so I could see you more often.

All my love, Darling  
NED

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.

FUNDS MAY BE QUICKLY, SAFELY AND ECONOMICALLY TRANSFERRED BY MONEY ORDER TELEGRAM. (PLEASE TURN OVER.)

RECEIVED TELEGRAM

The first line of this telegram contains the following particulars in the order named.

Office or Origin.	Words.	Time Lodged.	No.	By
MIL PO REDBANK	17	1 55pm	17	

Remarks.

Sch. C.2556.—10/1939.

To

MRS FLEWELLSMITH

PIER CAFE

WYNNUM. CENTRAL.

DAWN NO LEAVE WEDNESDAY ON DUTY SEE YOU SATURDAY LOVE

NED

2 12pmJK

1. Dawn was staying with Ned's parents behind the Pier Cafe (see address on envelope) on the beachfront at Wynnum, about 25 miles northeast of Redbank.
2. Ned was unable to get leave until the following Saturday (see telegram, left, sent on Tuesday, 3 December). He spent Saturday, 7 December at Wynnum with Dawn and his parents. On the Sunday, Dawn, Ned and his mother went to Redbank for visitors' day.

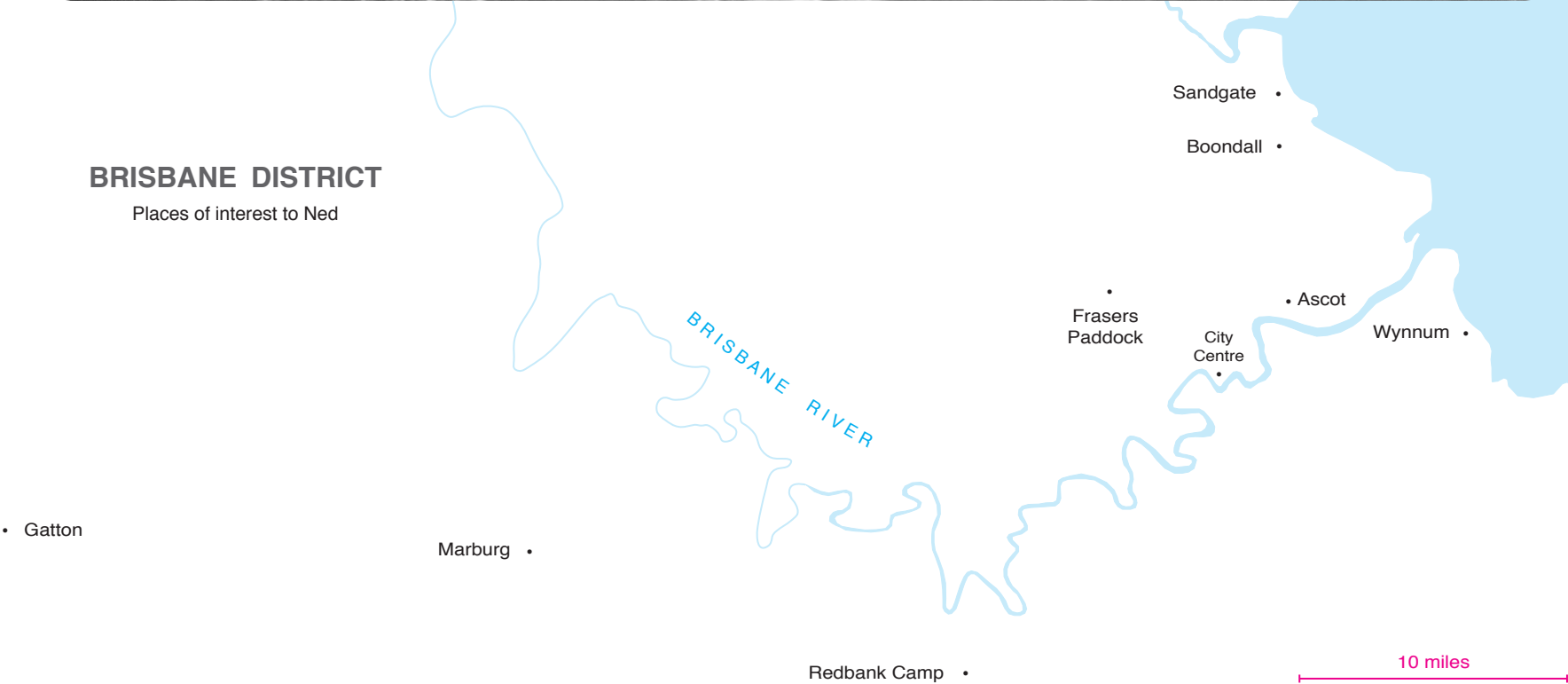
Opposite: Ned's parents, Lou and William, taken by the seaside at Wynnum during Ned's visit on Saturday, 7 December. [Dawn, DF15, 1940]





**BRISBANE DISTRICT**

Places of interest to Ned





**Left:** Ned and Dawn on the esplanade at Wynnum.  
*[Dawn, DF14, Saturday 7/12/1940]*

**Opposite left:** Ned's mother, Lou, and Dawn, having a picnic on visitors' day at Redbank just before Ned left for overseas. Ned's hat, showing the diamond insignia of the 7th Division, is on the blanket.

Dawn's writing on back of photo: *Mother and I at send-off and march at Redbank one Sunday.*  
*[Ned, NF80, Sunday 8/12/1940]*

**Opposite right:** Ned (centre) and Dawn (second from right) at Redbank on visitors' day. The other people are unidentified.  
*[Ned, NF47, Sunday 8/12/1940]*



## *I'll meet you at the corner where the bus stops*

*Redbank Camp  
Monday, 9 December 1940*

TO MY PRECIOUS DAWN – Well, Darling, we go out on a manoeuvre tomorrow and stop out all night, arriving back in camp Wednesday midday. The whole battalion is going, I think. Anyway, I might not go as I've been detailed to the wood heap till Friday. I hope I stay behind because then I will be able to get leave Wednesday night. Darling, I'll be in on Wednesday night if at all possible, so I'll meet you at the corner where the bus stops, Sweet Heart, about 7.30.

Did you get home okay last night? I was a ½ hour late but they haven't said anything about it yet.

I hope you can understand this scribble, Dearest, but I'm in a hurry. One of the boys is waiting to take this letter to post it, so I'll close. Till Wednesday night, Darling. Don't forget to turn up, Dearest.

*All my love. Precious  
Gavin's love truly. Ned.  
x x x x x*

1. Dawn and Ned's mother had been to Redbank the day before (Sunday) for visitors' day. Ned was late getting back to camp because he had seen them to the train station.



*Redbank Camp  
Monday, 16 December 1940*

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Well, Precious, things are all in a mess here at present. We don't know where we stand. On arrival here yesterday midday, the first news they broke to us was that our departure was postponed indefinitely, and that there was leave at night. This morning, we were ordered to pack everything away in their proper kit bags and get out on parade in full dress: uniforms, gaiters, pack and rifles. After the parade we had to march for about a mile. The only things that we left behind were our kit bags. Next they told us to be ready to leave at 10 minutes notice; and now we are warned that there will be an alarm about 2 o'clock in the morning and we will have to march to Goodna, or some other such place, with packs and rifles, arriving back here sometime after sunrise. So you can guess just what state we are in. We are not even sure we will come back to Redbank, although we are hoping for the best.

Well, Sweet Heart, that's enough about happenings up here. How are you getting on down there? Is everything okay?

You still might see me again, Darling. We go by train from here to South Brisbane and then change to the interstate train. We are allowed to get out on the platform to see our friends. So, Dearest, if you make up your mind to come you will more than likely see me. That is, of course, if we don't leave in the dead of night. My carriage is No. 8. If you come, see if you can find a carriage with 8 on it somewhere and ask for me.

I'll close, darling Sweet Heart, till next time. I'll write if anything else turns up – when we are leaving etc – if we are told. Hoping this finds you better than it leaves me. All the best, Precious, and hold your chin up.

*From your ever loving  
Soldier. Ned.  
x x x x x*





Redbank. Camp.

Mon. 23<sup>rd</sup>. 40.

Dearest Dawn.

This is just a note to let you know when we are leaving. Our departure takes place on Thurs Day. 25<sup>th</sup>. We are to arrive at Ell. Bris. St. at 12.30 P.M. & leave about 1.30. so Darling if you want to come <sup>& say me</sup> sending the tickets with this letter. Well, Dearest, this letter has to go as soon as possible. I'll keep a lookout for you, but if you don't feel like coming, don't. because it might not be worth all the trouble.

From your  
Ever Loving Soldier  
Sweetheart. Ned.

P.S. I Love you.  
Precious.

x x x x x



*Redbank Camp  
Monday, 23 December 1940*

DEAREST DAWN,

This is just a note to let you know when we are leaving. Our departure takes place on Xmas Day, 25<sup>th</sup>. We are to arrive at South Brisbane Station at 12.30 p.m. and leave about 1.30. So Darling, if you want to come and see me I'm sending the tickets with this letter.

Well, Dearest, this letter has to go as soon as possible. I'll keep a lookout for you, but if you don't feel like coming, don't, because it might not be worth all the trouble.

*From your  
ever-loving Soldier  
Sweet Heart, NED*

**Below:** Kit inspection, Redbank, before leaving for the Middle East.  
[Ned, NF48, December 1940]



NED used to get a little bit of leave and he'd come down to Wynnum. The front gate had a latch over the top and I could hear the latch clicking and I'd think: "Oh, that's Ned; he's got a few hours' leave". Or it might have been Clive. They really didn't get much time off. It was all hush-hush. We'd think we'd said hooray for the last time, but as I said, that lock on the gate – we could hear the latch fall down and we'd know it was either Ned or Clive. We could hear their footsteps coming and it might be either of them. They might get leave till midnight and have to be back at camp again.

Then when it came near Christmas I thought we'd be able to spend Christmas together; that Ned would probably get leave. But he didn't, y'see. He went on the train. That's when he went overseas – Christmas Day.

Ned's parents got two passes to go to the train station at South Brisbane to see him off.

### A CARRIAGE WITH 8 ON IT

Pop stayed home. It would have meant a lot to him, but he stayed home and gave his ticket to me so that I could go with Lou, Ned's mum. I'll always thank Pop for doing that. It was decent of him. There were only two tickets given out and he stayed home so I could go.

Lou and I caught the train into South Brisbane and we waited on the platform for Ned. A lot of people had Christmas cakes and all that sort of thing. The train came through from Roma St and it was packed with troops. "Look for a carriage with 8 on it" Ned had told me in a letter, "and you might see me." And there he was in full uniform, hat and all.

I waved Ned goodbye at South Brisbane Station. There were little groups crying on the platform and... well, we didn't know if our boys were coming back. They were waving from the train windows when it left, and you wondered if you were ever going to see them again.

DAWN



## NED TO THE MIDDLE EAST

Edited extracts, *Let Enemies Beware*: pp 24-31

VISITORS' DAY on 8 December at Redbank was attended by a large crowd of friends and relatives. The troops then formally paraded and the CO addressed the battalion and the many onlookers. After the parade, afternoon tea was served and some of the visitors stayed on for an evening meal.

Another successful visitors' day was conducted on 15 December, and three days later the battalion was informed that it would move on Christmas Day. The last major activity before the battalion left Redbank was an 18-mile route march with full packs, held on the night of 19 December.

At a parade held on 22 December, the State President of the RSL presented a battle sash to the battalion inscribed with the battle honours won by the original 15th Battalion in the First World War. In his address the president reminded them of their motto (*Caveant Hostes* – let the enemy beware). "When you men are overseas I know that the motto will be upheld. I wish you good luck and a safe return."

On Christmas Day the men of the 2/15th arose at 5 a.m., had an early breakfast, cleaned up the camp, and then attended a special Christmas Day church service. After lunch, the battalion marched to Redbank Railway Station and boarded a train. The long trip to Sydney was broken at South Brisbane Station [where Ned was farewelled by Dawn and his mother] for a change to the interstate train.

The men were taken by ferry to the *Queen Mary* during the afternoon of 26 December. They would have been amazed at the size of the vessel and the luxury of the accommodation, particularly when compared to the *Zealandia*, the ship in which they went to Darwin. Most of the cabins had private bathrooms and lavatories, but due to the large number of troops on board, sleeping and eating had to be done in shifts.

The *Queen Mary*, as part of a convoy, left Sydney Harbour at 7 a.m. on 28 December. A noisy farewell-flotilla of small vessels accompanied the giant liner as far as Sydney Heads. The little necessities on board which make for a more comfortable life were provided by the Australian Comforts Fund. Prior to sailing the battalion received 1012 cakes of shaving soap, 1008 tooth brushes, 1007 tubes of toothpaste, 1153 pencils, 792 tins of foot powder, 4 boxes of toilet soap, and 6 boxes of washing soap. In addition, the troops had access to beer at only 5d a pint.

The convoy arrived at Fremantle on the morning of 3 January and resumed its journey two days later. It crossed the Equator on 10 January and arrived at Trincomalee on the northeast coast of Ceylon on 12 January. There they transferred from the *Queen Mary* to the *Indrapoera*. The men were given shore leave when they arrived at Colombo on 14 January. For the majority of the men, this was their first encounter with Asian culture.

The convoy left Colombo on 16 January, passed through the Suez Canal, and disembarked at Kantara East on 2 February 1941.

QX 3199. "D" Coy. 2/15 Bn.  
A.I.F. Abroad.

At Sea. 27.12.40

To My Dearest Sweet Heart

Well, Precious, we

have arrived on board and it sure was a swell boat before the army took over. Our trip down on the train was tiring, but we had a fairly good time as things were. There were a devil of a lot of boats of all descriptions, ferries to canoes, packed to the brim, sailing round us nearly all of yesterday. The people on the ferry go mad when they pass us.

Some of the people in the boats are collecting mail from the boys. I'm throwing this over the side<sup>1</sup> as soon as I've finished it. Darling, excuse the writing. There is no place to write here, so I'm sitting on the side of my bunk and it's not the best place to write.

We don't know when we leave. We are on the *Queen Mary* and there are still eight more train loads to arrive. All our battalion are aboard here now. We arrived on board yesterday about 1.30. We passed under the Harbour Bridge on the way over on the ferry and it doesn't seem to be as much as it's cracked up to be. Sydney is a pretty big place, but it's crammed in everywhere by the look of things from here.

Darling, I don't know if this will ever reach you, but I'm hoping so. We are anchored just out from Taronga Park. I think Mum's been there when she was down a couple of years ago.

Well, my Precious, this will have to do you for the present as we are going to breakfast soon. Darling, how are you all up there? Give my love to Mum and Dad and the rest.

My Sweet Heart, look after yourself and keep your chin up. And smile, Darling. I'll be back again, Sweet Heart, before you realise I'm coming back.

So Long, My Precious, till we  
meet again. From your  
Ever Loving Soldier.

P.S. I love you  
Precious.

Ned.

xxxxxx  
xxx

1. Soldiers on the *Queen Mary* threw their letters over the side (see Thursday 26 December, p80) and they were collected and posted by people in the small boats which had surrounded the ship. Ned's letter is probably one of the very few to survive this unique postal method to reach its destination, and to be subsequently preserved.



[censored]

At Sea

To my Precious Sweet Heart,

Just a line to let you know we are actually on our way, Dawn. We left early this morning and we were glad, too, as it wasn't the most pleasant fun watching people having a good time and not being able to tell you, Dearest, because all letters will be censored from now on. This letter will be posted [...censored...]

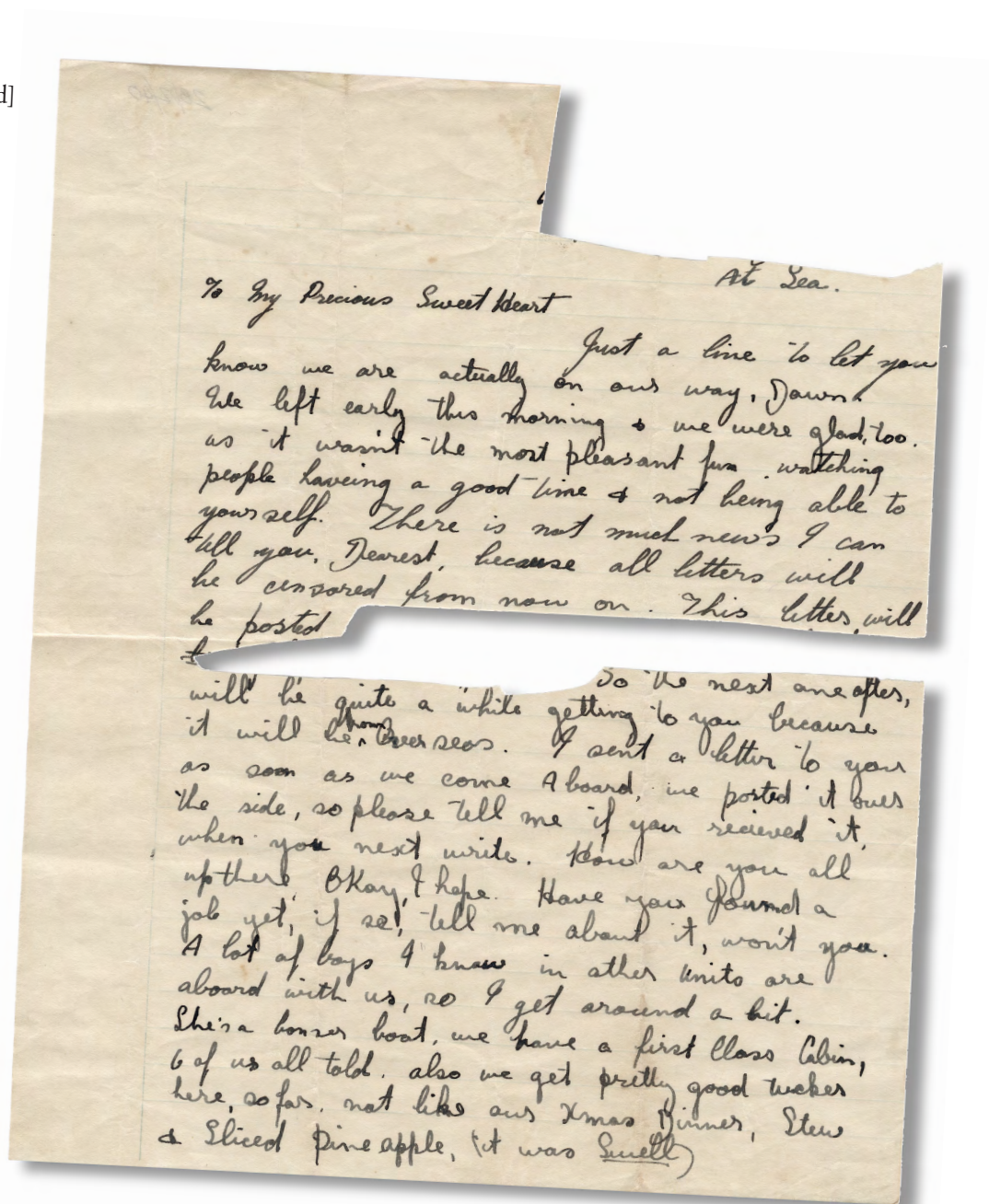
so the next one after, will be quite a while getting to you because it will be from overseas. I sent a letter to you as soon as we came aboard, we posted it over the side, so please tell me if you received it when you next write. How are you all up there? Okay I hope. Have you found a job yet? If so, tell me about it, won't you. A lot of the boys I know in other units are aboard with us, so I get around a bit. She's a bonzer boat, we have a first class cabin, 6 of us all told. Also we get pretty good tucker here, so far, not like our Xmas Dinner. Stew and sliced pineapple. It was swell.

By the way, Darling, I had most of my hair shorn off today. I wish you were here to see it. Do you think you would like it?

This is the second letter I've written to you today, Sweetest. The other one was in pencil so I tore it up. I had no ink before, till one of the boys found his.

So long, Sweet Heart. Here's lots of luck and best wishes for the New Year to you and all at home.

*All my love and kisses for you Sweet  
from yours truly  
NED*



Above: The first letter of Ned's to undergo the censor's scissors.

Darling,  
you want to know if I've still got your photo.  
I always carry it with me,  
next to my heart.  
And that night when you slipped in between the train and platform –  
of course I remember.  
I got a hell of a scare.  
The worst I've ever had.

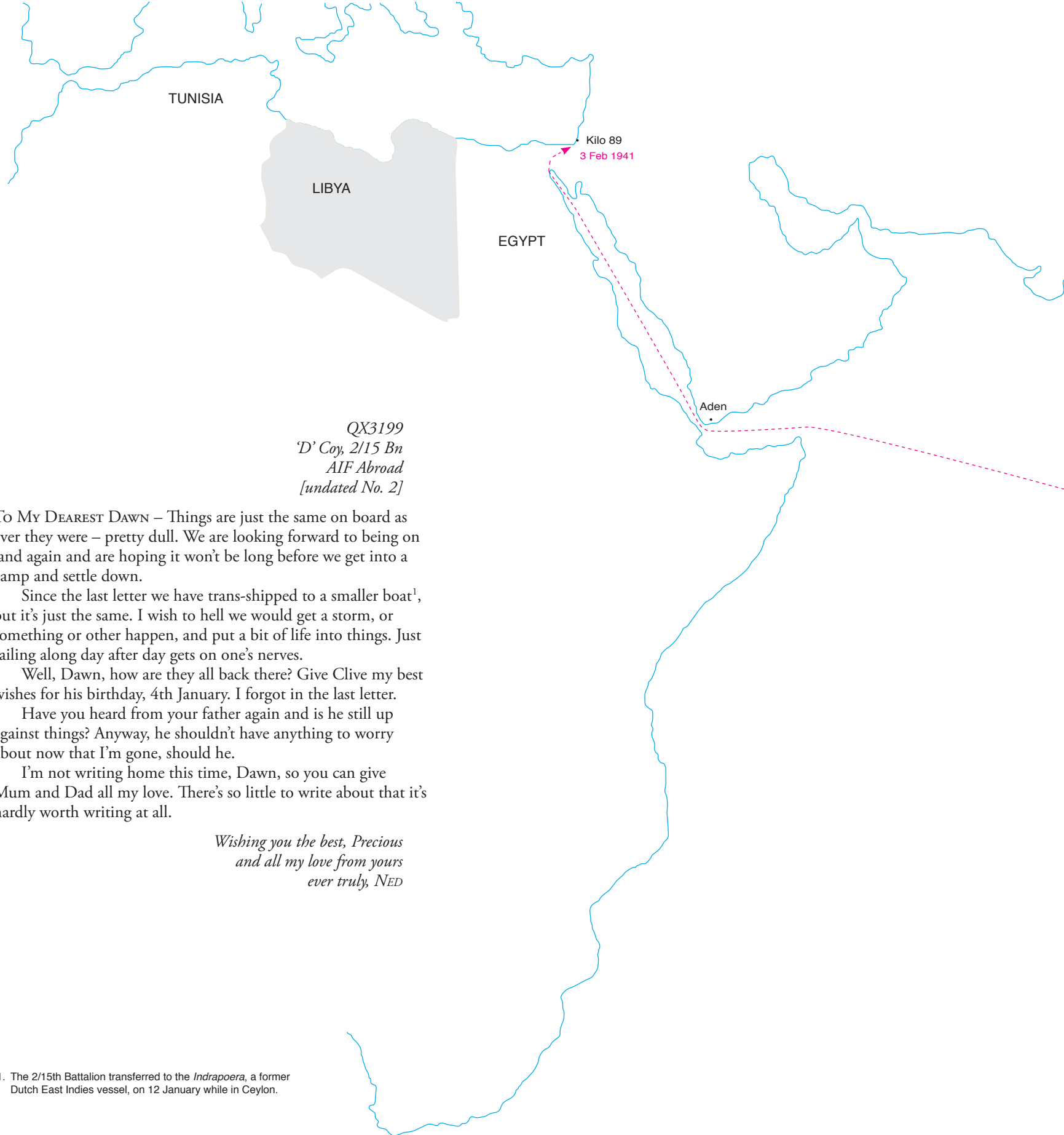
Also, Sweet Heart,  
I'll never forget those few mad weeks  
between returning from Darwin  
and leaving for here.  
They were mad, weren't they.  
I didn't really know whether I was on my head or what.

Darling, I love you more than I can say on paper.  
You know I love and trust you,  
but I wouldn't be human if I wasn't a bit jealous.  
I only wish we were together again, Sweet Heart,  
if only for a few months,  
and then I'd go anywhere with you.

It was awful when we saw each other and then we had to part.  
I can still see your sadness when the train pulled out of South Brisbane,  
and I always will, too, Dearest.



## ***Letters 1941***



*QX3199  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF Abroad  
[undated No. 2]*

TO MY DEAREST DAWN – Things are just the same on board as ever they were – pretty dull. We are looking forward to being on land again and are hoping it won't be long before we get into a camp and settle down.

Since the last letter we have trans-shipped to a smaller boat<sup>1</sup>, but it's just the same. I wish to hell we would get a storm, or something or other happen, and put a bit of life into things. Just sailing along day after day gets on one's nerves.

Well, Dawn, how are they all back there? Give Clive my best wishes for his birthday, 4th January. I forgot in the last letter.

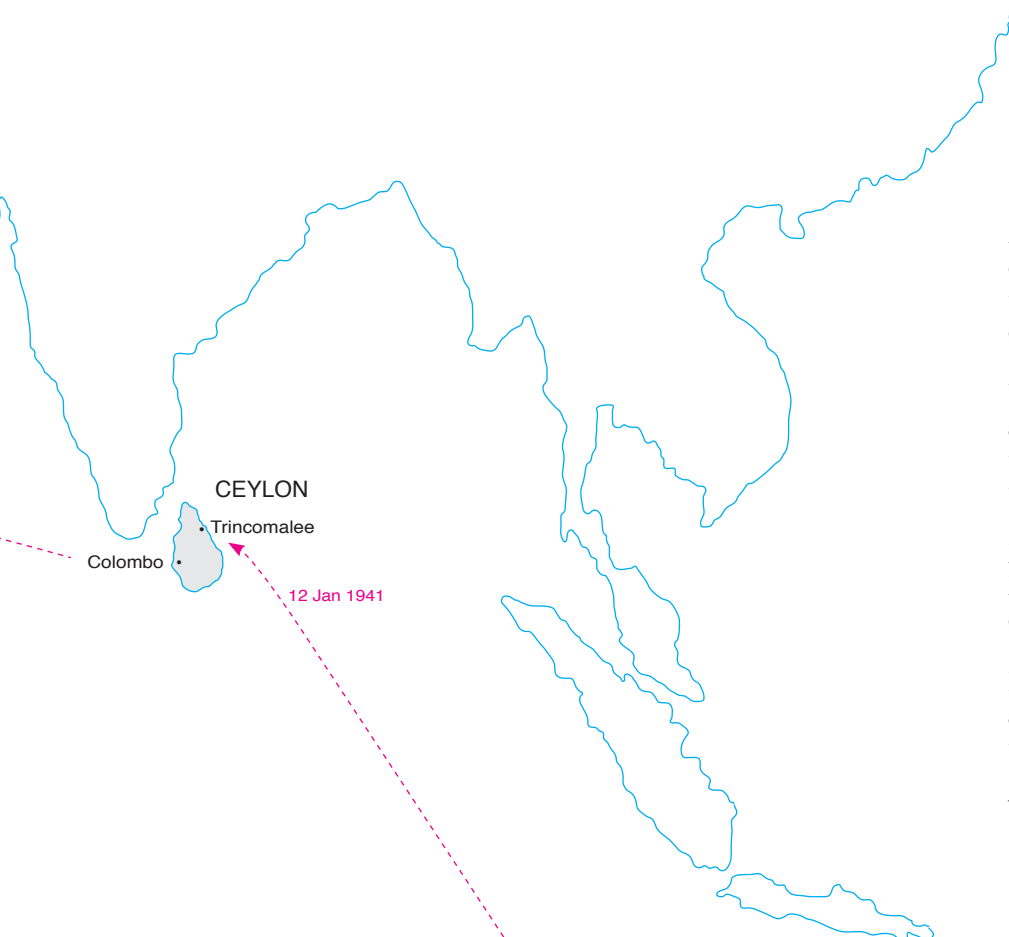
Have you heard from your father again and is he still up against things? Anyway, he shouldn't have anything to worry about now that I'm gone, should he.

I'm not writing home this time, Dawn, so you can give Mum and Dad all my love. There's so little to write about that it's hardly worth writing at all.

*Wishing you the best, Precious  
and all my love from yours  
ever truly, NED*

1. The 2/15th Battalion transferred to the *Indrapoera*, a former Dutch East Indies vessel, on 12 January while in Ceylon.





*QX3199 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF Abroad  
At Sea  
[Undated No.1]*

MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Just another line, Darling, before we leave dear old Aussie too far behind. Also, to let you know how things are going. I can't tell you everything I would like to, but you know how that comes about, don't you.

Well, Darling, I guess the main thing I'm pleased about is that I haven't been sick yet. Of course, this is my third sea trip now, so I shouldn't be either, should I. Anyway, so far hardly anyone has been seasick. It's been a perfect trip up till now. She's a great boat to travel on. It will do me for a honeymoon trip after the war. Will you be in on it, Precious? I hope so.

Well, Darling, there is nothing I can really tell you about. We have our hands tied pretty well and I don't know just what I can say. Our daily work is lectures, rifle drill and physical training. Every day is just a repetition of the day before and it gets on one's nerves.

Just now they are holding trials for the boxing championship of the boat. I'm not in it, or likely to be either. Also, of a night they show pictures. It's the same show every night, worse luck. Sometimes they put a concert on, but not too often.

Darling, give my love to Mum and Dad and anyone else who is there. You can give this letter to them to read as all mail has to be handed in before 5 o'clock to be censored and I may not have time to write another letter.

*All my love and then some more to you, Sweet  
NED*



## ‘D’ Company Diary

*Wednesday 25 December 1940* – The 26th anniversary of the embarkation of the old 15th Battalion, World War 1.

Early reveille 0500 hrs. All necessary final preparations made for departure from Redbank Camp. Companies paraded 0715 hrs after an early breakfast, and placed personal gear and equipment on parade ground, then broke off for final cleaning up of camp.

Battalion paraded at 1100 hrs for final instructions, followed by church parade to commemorate Christmas. ‘C’, ‘D’ and portion of HQ Company then moved off to Redbank Station wearing serge uniforms, marching order, and carrying both kitbags. Total load approximately 98 lbs per man.

About 450 entrained on first train and moved to South Brisbane Station. Changed to the Kyogle train which moved out on time at 1400 hrs, the troops being given a wonderful send off by their friends. As far as the eye could see, nearly every window had someone waving from it.

After passing Clapham Junction a change was made into shirts and shorts. The discomforts and aching backs caused by the march and heavy load, and the perspiration caused by the heavy clothing were soon forgotten as the serious business of disposing of the Christmas hampers was attended to: roast duck, fowl, puddings, nuts, cake and a few stimulating drinks. A true Christmas spirit was apparent throughout the whole train.

On arrival at Casino buckets of steaming hot tea and parcels of sandwiches were handed out and the train again continued on its way. The majority of the company spent a reasonably comfortable night, sufficiently tired to sleep in any position.

*Thursday 26 December* – First stop was Gloucester at 0700 hrs where a breakfast parcel and more tea were handed out. The train approached Woy Woy at approximately 1030 hrs. The sight of this beautiful resort, and afterwards the reaches of the Hawkesbury River visible for so many miles, must have left a vivid impression in many minds.

The Hawkesbury Bridge was crossed and the change made back into serge in readiness for detrainment, which took place at Darling Harbour. The whole trainload embarked on one ferry boat to be ferried out to our ship, the *Queen Mary*. Embarkation took place without any hitch and the troops settled down to find their way about.

“Tin Can” mail was soon in operation. Thousands of letters must have been posted in this way, being picked up by people in every kind of craft imaginable. Troops were greatly amused in witnessing a “naval engagement” between a naval launch, which was attempting to stop this passing of uncensored mail, and some unruly Mess Orderlies from the QX (as the *Queen Mary* was officially known). The ammunition used was potatoes and 11 direct hits were reported.

The Boxing Day holiday allowed thousands of sightseers to make the round trip in ferry boats to see the ship and the troops.

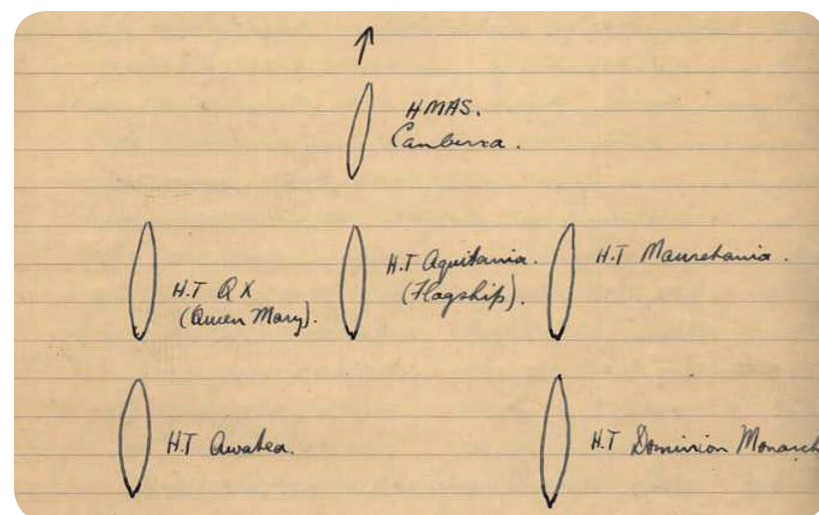
*Friday 27 December* – Practically a repetition of the previous day. Thousands more came to see the ship, some with megaphones to try and make themselves heard, others with large placards displaying the name of the person they wished to see or speak to, but only a small portion could have satisfied their wishes.

*Saturday 28 December* – Sailed from Sydney Harbour at 0700 hrs. The ships in the convoy consisting of *HMAS Canberra* (escorting vessel), *Aquitania*, *Dominion Monarch*, *Awatea*, and *Queen Mary*. The coastline was lost to view after Botany Bay and the convoy continued in a southerly direction.

*Sunday 29 December* – Still sailing south. The troops are beginning to feel the effects of the cold, especially those who have had their hair cut very short. All manner of caps were in evidence today. Church parades were held for all denominations in various parts of the ship.

*Monday 30 December* – Still sailing south. The weather was noticeably colder today. Mount Ben Lomond (northeastern Tasmania) was visible from about 1530 hrs and was still visible until late in the afternoon. Mt Wellington (Hobart) showed clearly on the starboard side at 1800 hrs. Course must have changed to a westerly direction later in the evening to round Maatsuyker Light, which we passed about midnight.

*Tuesday 31 December* – Sailing almost due west all day, out of sight of land. The *Mauretania* joined the convoy at dusk this evening. The convoy is now proceeding in this order:



Rumour hath it that this is the largest convoy of men and tonnage that has ever left Australia, but this has not been stated officially.

New Year's Eve celebrations took place in the evening with extension of time in the messes to 2300 hrs to allow of singing *Auld Lang Syne* at midnight Eastern Standard Time so that this traditional ceremony could take place at the same actual time as it is taking place at home.

**Above:** Sketch of convoy as it steamed west from Tasmania.

[‘D’ Company Diary, p4]



*Wednesday 1 January 1941* – The New Year has started. In honour of the occasion no training was carried out today. At least half the company are suffering from colds, no doubt contracted because of the changes in temperature they have experienced and the artificial ventilation of the ship.

Nearly everyone is laying in a stock of tobacco and cigarettes which, of course, are sold duty free. A comparison of prices is interesting. Capstans and 333s – 5d per packet. Beer and spirits are also cheap. Beer – 5d per pint. Spirits – whisky 6d, gin 4d, rum 3d. Spirits, however, are not available to the men.

*Thursday 2 January* – Uneventful day. The weather was noticeably warmer and the Queensland troops are feeling much happier now that sweaters have been discarded. Speculation is taking place as to when we will reach port again and whether it will be Fremantle or Albany. Considering the bearing we have been on and the convoy speed (approximately 20 knots) it would appear that we are bound for Fremantle.

The hospital ship *Manunda* steamed past us at 1915 hrs and stayed at the head of the convoy for a while. This is the fourth time most of us have seen the *Manunda*: in Darwin harbour, between Darwin and Brisbane, in Sydney harbour, and again now.

*Friday 3 January* – Steamed into Fremantle at 0815 hrs and anchored in the harbour. There was great disappointment when it was found that there would be no leave.

*Saturday 4 January* – Very hot on board. The weather has been warm and the ship is at anchor. Several men of other companies have been charged with attempting to pass uncensored mail by “Tin Can” mail. They are to be paraded tomorrow to the CO.

*Sunday 5 January* – Under way again at 0700 hrs. We expect our destination to be Bombay or Ceylon, and there is considerable talk of a place called Trincomalee (northeast coast of Ceylon), but of course these are only rumours. Mail which came aboard at Fremantle was distributed today and assisted to put the company in higher spirits than usual. Weather is noticeably warmer, almost tropical. The ship is much more pleasant now that we are on the move.

*Monday 6 January* – Steaming in a NNW direction, but ships are changing course so frequently and carrying out manoeuvres so often that it is difficult to tell exactly what direction we are headed in. 81 members of other companies were fined £5 each for attempting to send uncensored mail.

*Tuesday 7 January* – Uneventful day.

*Wednesday 8 January* – Still steaming in approximately the same direction. Weather very hot now. We must be very near the Equator. Many debates have taken place on just how far we are from the line and just when we will cross it.

Ship's HQ has decided to enforce the Ships Standing Orders regarding gambling. This will cause a certain amount of discontent among those who run the games, but will be for the general benefit of the mugs.

*Thursday 9 January* – Rather uneventful. The convoy steamed nearly all day through the unruffled seas of the doldrums. Weather still very hot and humid. Several rain storms were encountered which strengthened the belief that we are very near the line.

*Friday 10 January* – It has been said unofficially that we crossed the line today. General opinion seems to favour the belief that we are bound for Trincomalee for trans-shipment to smaller ships. We will no doubt soon know as we are a long way north and cannot be far from Ceylon.

*Saturday 11 January* – Our ship left the convoy at 1310 hrs today to allow for a manoeuvre. Unfortunately, a blinding rainstorm and very poor visibility prevented us from seeing the manoeuvre, which must have been a rather interesting one as we turned a complete circle.

*Sunday 12 January* – Anchored in Trincomalee Harbour at 0700 hrs. This harbour must be one of the most beautiful in the world. It appears to be about three quarters the size of Sydney Harbour and is surrounded by beautiful tropical growth. The entrance, protected by a boom, is extremely narrow and deep.

Members of the company were greatly amused by the habits of the natives who were busy in their outrigger canoes picking rubbish from the harbour waters which had been thrown overboard from the ship, and by the antics of a party of coolies who were placing a platform in position between two pontoons. Some of the troops would wait until the platform was nearly in place and then throw small coins onto the pontoon. The coolies would immediately drop the platform and scramble for the coins.

‘D’ Company fell in and paraded on deck at 1330 hrs, preparatory to trans-shipment. The operation was not completed until 1815 hrs, a considerable amount of delay taking place before we moved.

We found ourselves on the *Indrapoera*, a 13,000 ton Dutch East Indies liner, and commenced to settle in. In contrast to its dingy grey exterior, we found the ship to be surprisingly clean, but of course vastly different from the QX.

The *Indrapoera* steamed out of Trincomalee Harbour at 2030 hrs with the band playing and the remaining troops on the QX giving the battalion one of the most hearty send-offs that one body of troops could give another.

*Monday 13 January* – Steamed south all day along the east coast of Ceylon.

*Tuesday 14 January* – Tied up in Colombo at 0730 hrs. The ship was immediately rushed by small boats endeavouring to sell all manner of useful and useless souvenirs. The troops soon learnt to haggle with these merchants until they would accept a reasonable price for their wares. Trading proceeded apace all day in this manner, the troops being highly amused at the natives trying to use some of our Australian slang.

Our old friend the *Manunda* was in harbour and we are wondering when we will see her again.

A native boy entertained the men by diving for small silver coins. He refused to dive for copper coins and was extremely annoyed at one stage to find that he had dived for a penny wrapped in silver paper.

The whole of the battalion are to have leave<sup>1</sup> tomorrow and there is a great deal of excitement and talk about what they will do.

1. Ned's description of his day of leave in Colombo is on p119.

*Wednesday 15 January* – ‘D’ Company had an enjoyable and educative day ashore. Five members overstayed their leave and are to be dealt with in the morning. Many stories were recounted, some funny, some rather sad, of how their money was prised from them by the natives. This day will not be forgotten by the men for a long time.

*Thursday 16 January* – Yesterday’s offenders were paraded and ordered by Captain Peek to do extra duties and be deprived of leave (if any) at our next port of call.

Bargaining with the natives was carried out until the last minute before departure. We cleared the boom at 1235 hrs, our ship dipping her flag to the *Mauretania* as she passed in the harbour. Joining the other 12 ships of the convoy we sailed west towards our destination (the Middle East we hope) escorted by *HMAS Canberra*, a light cruiser, and an armed merchantman. At this stage it is not possible to see the names of all the ships in the convoy, or determine their exact formation, as they are continually changing course and carrying out various manoeuvres to trick any submarines that may have designs on us.

*Friday 17 January* – ‘D’ company mounted a permanent picquet on both sides of the promenade deck, this duty being supplied by 16 Platoon. There have been a few complaints from the men regarding the food, which is cooked very differently from our Australian way of cooking. It appears to be very oily.

*Saturday 18 January* – *HMAS Canberra* left our convoy about 1500 hrs. It is apparent she has gone back now, presumably to escort the *Queen Mary* and *Aquitania* to Sydney.

*Sunday 19 January* – Uneventful day. Church parade in morning, followed by washing parade. Six members of the company were charged with gambling. Case will be heard by OC tomorrow.

*Monday 20 January* – Uneventful day. Five privates fined 5/- for gambling. One also fined £1 for disobedience. Weather pleasantly cool with light showers in the morning. Exceptionally dark night with a good deal of phosphorescence in the water.

*Tuesday 21 January* – Still steaming in approximately the same direction. Pleasant clear day, rather clouded in the early morning.

*Wednesday 22 January* – Rumour hath it that we are in the wide northern extremities of the Gulf of Aden. An unofficial report that the AIF had taken Tobruk today was passed round the ship, but no official verification of this was forthcoming.

*Thursday 23 January* – The convoy passed Aden (out of sight on our starboard side) at 1100 hrs.

It was officially announced in the *Indrapoera News* today that Tobruk has fallen to the AIF. Generally speaking, the battalion is pleased this is happening, but sorry they are not there to take part in the job. The

majority of them would be thankful if we were attacked by a sub or plane just to see some action and convince us that we are actually in the war.

*Friday 24 January* – Very interesting day. Two merchant vessels were added to the convoy some time during the night. This brings the total number of ships in the convoy to 15. Portion of the forenoon was taken up with pay, and the afternoon was spent in washing and deck games. ‘D’ company tug-o-war team was unsuccessful. ‘A’ Company were the winners, succeeding in pulling HQ Company practically off their feet in two straight pulls, the first rifle company to so far manage this feat.

*Indrapoera News* today announced that the AIF had hoisted the Australian flag at Tobruk and gave details of extensive damage to the fort and the capture of many prisoners and much equipment.

We are now well into the Red Sea and the end of the first stage of our long journey is in sight.

*Saturday 25 January* – Quiet day. One of the light cruisers steamed through the convoy from our left rear to a forward position diagonally opposite. This occurred at about 1800 hrs and our troops gave them a rousing cheer as they passed. The sailors lined the rails of their vessel and responded in true naval fashion.

*Sunday 26 January* – Very quiet day. Our escort has now been reduced to one vessel. The light cruiser which steamed through the convoy last night evidently did so as a farewell gesture to the ships it had been protecting.

Special services were held on board to commemorate Australia Day and as a thanksgiving for the victories of the AIF in Libya.

*Monday 27 January* – The convoy entered the Gulf of Suez at about 1400 hrs. Mt Sinai had then been visible for some considerable time. The barrenness of the coast on either side of the gulf was such as the majority of us had never seen before.

Shortly after entering the gulf the formation of the convoy was changed to two lines, and later in the evening to one line, headed by our escort. The *Indrapoera* is 11th in the line.

It would appear that we are to disembark in the very near future. The strongest rumour is Kantara. On disembarkation we expect to receive an issue of hard rations to sustain us for the remainder of the trip.

*Tuesday 28 January* – At about 0630 hrs today the convoy entered the outer approach to Port Suez. Travelling then at a very slow rate we reached the harbour at 0800 hrs and anchored.

It would be almost impossible to count the number of ships in the harbour. How true is Britain’s boast that she is “Mistress of the Seas” when so many ships can congregate in such a small area.

A dodger, a copy of which is attached, was issued and read with interest by the troops.

**Opposite:** A reproduction of the dodger issued to the troops on 28 January 1941.

[‘D’ Company Diary, p20a]



Issued at Laey 28/1/41.

# WHAT OF PALESTINE?

## POINTERS FOR THE A.I.F.

YOU have just arrived in Palestine, a country with a history dating back to the beginning of time; a country in which you will discover the most amazing combinations of the primitive and the modern ages.

For most of you this is an entirely new experience. You are far away from the familiar people, customs and habits you have known for years, and the tendency is to relax many of those habits of which, as Australians, we are proud. We have a legacy from the last war, when the Australian Light Horse fought and won in Palestine and Sinai. During this period they established themselves in Arab eyes as soldiers second to none, as men to be trusted and respected. You must live up to this, and to help you, the G.O.C., A.I.F. has directed that these notes be issued to every man on arrival.

Palestine does not belong to us, it belongs to the Arabs and Jews, both of whose histories date long before ours, whose respective religions are two of the oldest in the world. As you know, there has in the past been trouble between these two races, who are now, however, united in the same cause as you, namely, to win this war. Hundreds of young men of both races have enlisted in the various units of the English Army and Air Force. Some of them have seen months of service in France, including the evacuation of Dunkirk, when they distinguished themselves. You are using their homeland as a training ground. You represent Australia, whether in the smallest Arab village, or the largest towns in Palestine. It is therefore of paramount importance that you learn, understand and respect their many customs, by far the greater part of which are due to their religion. These are different to ours, but none the less they must be respected.

### THE ARABS

The Arab is a Moslem, and as such, his most noticeable characteristics are his religious fervour and the segregation of his women folk.

Do not attempt to enter a Mosque unless in possession of permission to do so and unless conducted by a member of the Mosque. Remove your shoes and your hat. You can only enter a Mosque on bare or stockinged feet. Only attempt to enter those portions of the Mosque shown you by your guide.

A Mosque is a place of worship, respect it, do not talk loudly or laugh. Do not disturb any worshipper at his prayers or devotions. Under no circumstances enter during the hours of prayer.

The Arab Sabbath is the Friday.

When in the streets, remember that most Arabs know a little English, so do not speak of them in disparaging terms, or swear at them. Do not refer to them as "Wogs".

Arab women are kept severely apart from all men except their husbands, and are easily scared of Australians, so do not look at, or speak to any woman. Any attempt to molest them will only cause trouble for you. Walk along the roads as if they were not in sight. They are regarded as inferior to men, and you therefore should not even notice their presence.

Some Arabs have religious objections to being photographed, so if you see you are causing embarrassment with a camera, do not use it. Use will only frighten the women, and cause resentment in the men.

When you see the Arab seated on his donkey with his wife walking behind laden with goods, do not attempt to teach the Arab Australian customs. His wife is used to this. Do not interfere.

The Arab's standard of honesty is different from yours, so under no circumstances put temptations in his way. By both nature and religion the Arab is the most courteous person in the world. Do not take advantage of his courtesy and hospitality. Show him the courtesy he shows to you. You will rise in his esteem.

### THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The Jewish Sabbath is from sunset on the Friday to sunset on the Saturday.

When entering a synagogue, unless you are of Jewish faith, get permission and someone to conduct you. Do not remove your shoes or hat. It is a place of worship. Do not disturb worshippers, talk loudly, or laugh.

If the dress and appearance of some Jewish men or women appears strange to you, do not ridicule it. It is the custom of their sect. To the Jewish, Palestine is the Promised Land, their home. The greater percentage by far are idealists, and so many will appear fanatical in their ideas. Respect their ideas as you expect them to respect yours.

In both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv you will find people who have opened their house to Australians during the past months. No doubt many of you will make similar friendships. Their hospitality is genuine - do not abuse it.

### A FINAL HINT

You are an Australian, and it is by your appearance, behaviour and bearing that Australia and every Australian will be judged. Wear your uniform correctly, have it clean and neat. Be temperate in your desires and habits.

*S. J. Howell*  
General Staff 1st Australian Corps.

22nd October, 1940





*Monday 29 January* – The journey was continued at 0700 hrs this morning. The ship was soon under way and steaming into the mouth of the canal proper. On our port side at the entrance to the canal was the monument to the Unknown Soldier. A little further along on the same side, a military pipe band greeted us with music, a gesture greatly appreciated by the men.

The African side of the canal looked beautiful with its cultivations appearing wonderfully green in contrast to the dull sandy colour of the soil. The town of Suez, what we could see of it, was very pleasing to the eye. Further along on the same side, several mud huts of the locals were seen, and all of them turned out to give us a cheer.

At 0900 hrs we entered the first of the Suez Lakes, Little Bitter Lake, and at 1000 hrs we passed into Great Bitter Lake, where we anchored at 1100 hrs at the spot ✕ marked on the sketch.

While at anchor, an Arab came on board and offered to dive overboard, turning three somersaults if he were given a rupee. A collection was made and the man started to strip off for his dive. After taking off a coat, two shirts, three singlets and several yards of material which was wrapped around his waist, he stood in a pair of blue shorts. He then climbed to the top of the deck house, and after much haggling (probably for a rupee from the crowd on the deck above) he made the dive, one of the weirdest ever made. The fellow appeared to have no knowledge of diving and landed almost flat on his back. The remarkable part of the whole entertainment was that he managed to rise to the surface and swim to his boat.

At sunset a total of 27 ocean-going ships could be seen on the lake.

*Thursday 30 January* – The ship remained in Great Bitter Lake all day as shipping cannot use the canal until it has been swept and photographed, due to the fact that the canal area was raided early this morning at about 0415 hrs. The flashes and explosions could be seen and heard from the ship, though the majority of the men were asleep (including the writer) and did not know of the raid until it was reported this morning. The estimated positions of the bombed areas ✱ are shown in the sketch.

*Friday 31 January* – Still at anchor at Great Bitter Lake where we will remain until the canal is reported clear. The following is an extract from *Indrapoera News*: “Owing to mines dropped in this area during last night’s raid, the Suez Canal has to be cleared of mines before traffic is opened again. According to unofficial reports, 12 mines have been found already.”

*Saturday 1 February* – Another day spent in Great Bitter Lake. Bomber planes with magnetic-mine exploding apparatus were flying about during the day.





# Sketch of Suez Canal

from a sketch in  
H.J. Schonfields' *Suez Canal*

**Right:** Sketch map of the Suez Canal, redrawn from the original on page 23a of 'D' Company Diary.

**Opposite left:** Unidentified ship anchored near the *Indrapoera* in Great Bitter Lake. [Ned, NF63, Jan 1941]

**Opposite right:** A modified British bomber, a Vickers Wellington minesweeper, scouting for mines over the Suez Canal. Taken by Ned from on board the *Indrapoera*.

An enemy plane dropped mines into the canal in the early morning of 30 January and the convoy was delayed until the mines were cleared. Underneath the minesweeper was a circular ring, an induction loop 48' in diameter, through which electrical current was passed. The current induced a powerful magnetic field directed downwards, which could trigger the detonation of a mine if the aircraft was flying low enough. But not too low, otherwise the aircraft might become caught up in the blast. [Ned, NFA12, 1941]



*Sunday 2 February* – At 0645 this morning the anchor was weighed, and at 0700 the screws began to turn to take us a stage further on our trip. At 0915, after we had passed the famous memorial to the men who fell defending the Suez Canal in 1914-1918, the anchor was dropped in Lake Timsah and we were able to gaze on the small but beautiful, and fairly important, town of Ismailia. It is important for two reasons, firstly because

it is here that the staff of the Suez Canal Company live, and secondly because it is where the waters of the Nile flow down the Sweetwater Canal which runs parallel with the western side of the Suez.

Tomorrow morning is the 26th anniversary of events which led to the memorial – the Turks’ attempt to cross the Suez at a point situated between our present anchorage and our previous one.

**THE MONUMENT AT GEBEL MARIAM**



BESIDE the Suez Canal on the summit of a small rise called Gebel Mariam a few miles south of Ismailia, are the twin pillars erected to commemorate those who fell in the successful defence of the canal against the Turks in February 1915.

At the beginning of the First World War, access to the Suez Canal was vital to the British Empire. Crucial reinforcements from Australia, New Zealand and India would be travelling through the canal on their way to the Western Front. 30,000 defenders were on the canal by early 1915, most of them from the Indian Army. The focus of the defence was the railway junction at Ismailia, an obvious target for attack, but defence forces were maintained along the entire 90 miles of the canal.

In January 1915 the Turks decided to make an attempt to capture the Suez but faced a formidable set of problems. To get to the canal they would have to cross the Sinai desert, and once they arrived they would be outnumbered. Leaving from Beersheba on 14 January and moving only at night, they took 10 days to march the 180 miles across the Sinai. By early February they were close to the canal.

The attack against Ismailia began predawn on 3 February. Astride inflatable pontoons, the Turks came under heavy fire as they crossed the canal. Only three pontoons reached the west bank and their crews were killed or captured. More attacks followed, but were unsuccessful. The Turks had been rebuffed.

The next day the entire Turkish force began their

withdrawal across the Sinai. According to their own figures the Turks suffered around 1400 casualties. Commonwealth forces lost around 150.

Although subsequently involved in the defence of the canal, no Australian troops were engaged in the battle at Ismailia. The Turks were repulsed mainly by Indian troops.

No further attempt was made by the Turks to seize control of the Suez, but they did succeed in tying up a large number of Commonwealth troops. These troops, if not tied to the Suez, could have been released for duty at Gallipoli, and it is possible that their contribution to that campaign may have prevented the Australian disaster.





Once again we have seen the *Manunda*, now anchored in Lake Timsah. She is at present waiting to pick up the Bardia casualties<sup>1</sup>. With the *Manunda* is the *Karapara*, another hospital ship.

Our men have been indebted many times today to the generosity of men from the *Manunda*, the RAF, and the local imperial army who have given them cigarettes, matches and cigarette papers, all of which are scarce on our ship.

Packing in preparation for tomorrow's disembarkation was completed during the day.

*Monday 3 February* – At reveille we found that we were under way and entering the canal. The ship arrived at Kantara about 0900 hrs.

'D' Company disembarked at 1000 hrs and marched to the assembly point adjacent to Kantara East railway station. Rifles, equipment and gear were immediately dumped on the parade ground and a hot meal, tea and

cakes were enjoyed by all. The band then struck up a few marches and at 1220 hrs the equipment was put on again and the battalion entrained into box waggons. The troops were very cheerful about the waggons, and accepted it as a huge joke. At 1300 hrs the train journey commenced.

The train arrived at Kilo 89 at 2100 hrs and we were met by guides from the 2/13 Battalion who escorted us to the camp. Pte. N. Ericson of 'B' Company was our guide and proved very helpful and obliging. The 2/15th will always feel indebted to 'B' Company for the way they conducted and helped us.

No duties were mounted by the battalion on arrival. After a meal and an issue of blankets the men were pleased to settle in and get to bed at about 2230 hrs.

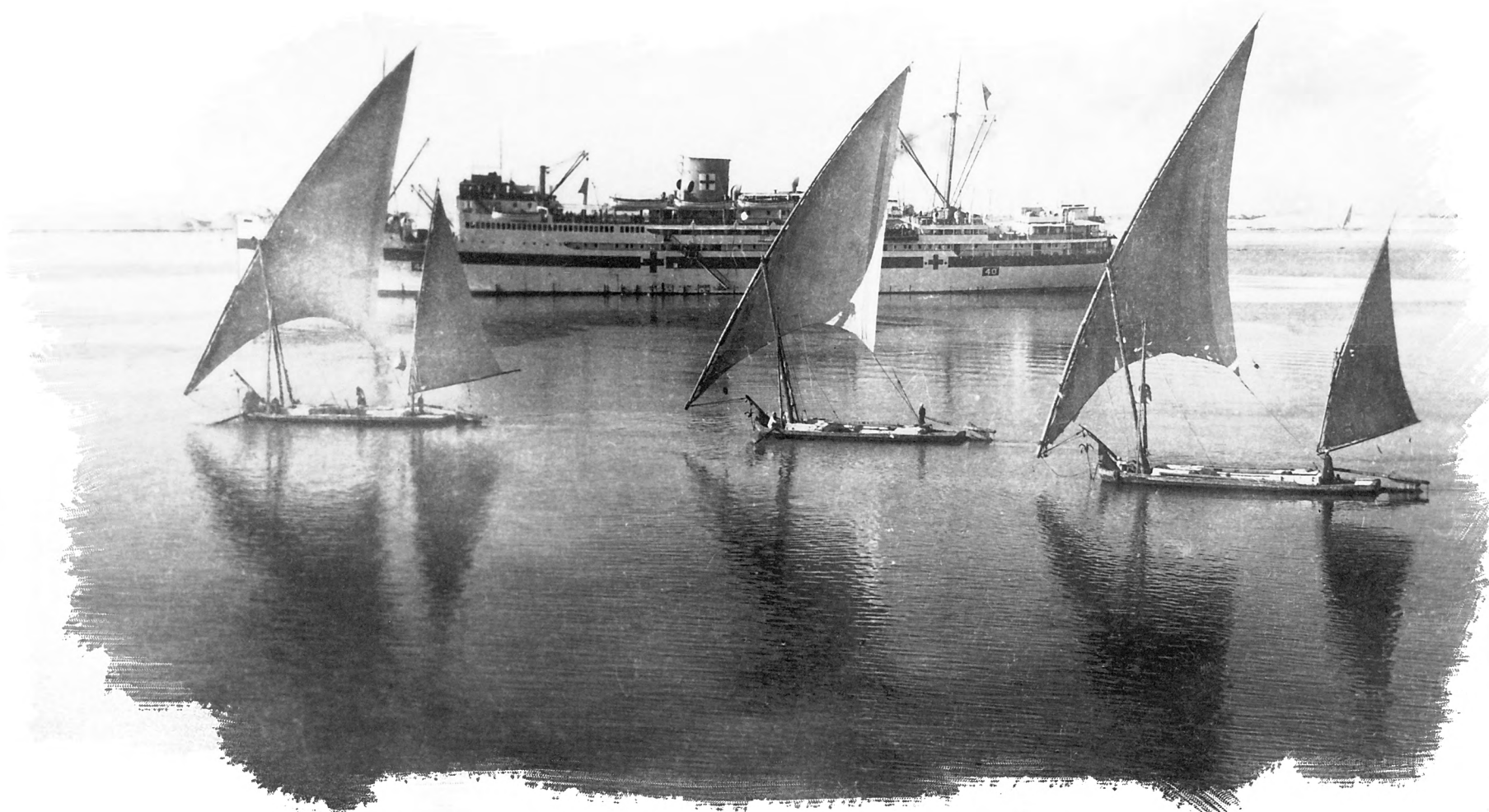
*Tuesday 4 February* – A large mail was received from Australia, scarcely a man in 'D' Company failing to receive a letter.



1. Bardia fell to the Allies on 5 January 1941. See p100

**Opposite:** The monument at Gebel Mariam, taken by Ned from on board the *Indrapoera*.  
[Ned, NF57, Jan 1941]

**Below:** Three Arabian feluccas (or xebecs) under lateen rig in front of "our old friend" the hospital ship *Manunda*, at anchor in Lake Timsah.  
[Ned, NF60, Jan 1941]





QX3199 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF Abroad  
Friday, 7 February 1941

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Well, Precious, I've arrived safely at last after six weeks' travelling and I'm glad to be in a camp<sup>1</sup> once more. The trip across was uneventful, not even a storm to break the monotony of it, so it was a pleasure to put my feet on solid ground once more after being on a boat for such a time.

Darling, I'm in Palestine at present and it's damn cold; too cold for my liking. I wish I was back there with you, Sweet.

I went to a concert here a couple of nights ago and Mr Menzies was there and gave a speech. The concert was one of the best I've seen for quite a time. They put it over very well.

Sweet Heart, I've just received your first letter since I left you and I feel so happy.

I'm glad you have got a job, Sweet, and hope you are getting on okay. You and Clive seem to hit it off, eh. I'm pleased about that. My brother ought to look after my interests while he's there, don't you think, Honey?

Those parts cut out of my letters, Dearest, I can't supply the information you want. If it was censored once it will be again, till we get orders otherwise. So, Darling, you will have to remain in suspense for a while.

Did you get a letter posted in Sydney, Sweet? Let me know please, as I would like to know if it got through.

Well, Sweet Heart, I'll have to close soon as it's getting on to supertime. I was going to send a cable to you, but they told us airmail gets there quicker so I didn't bother.

Look after yourself, Dearest, and give my love to everyone back there. Lots of love to you, my Dear, and let's hope for the best.

*From your ever-loving would-be soldier*  
NED



QX3199 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF Abroad  
Thursday, 13 February 1941

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Just a line to let you know I'm still okay, Precious, and missing you a lot more than I can say here. It's a long way between us now, Sweet, and God only knows just when we'll meet again and under what circumstances. Anyway, Darling, let's hope for the best, eh.

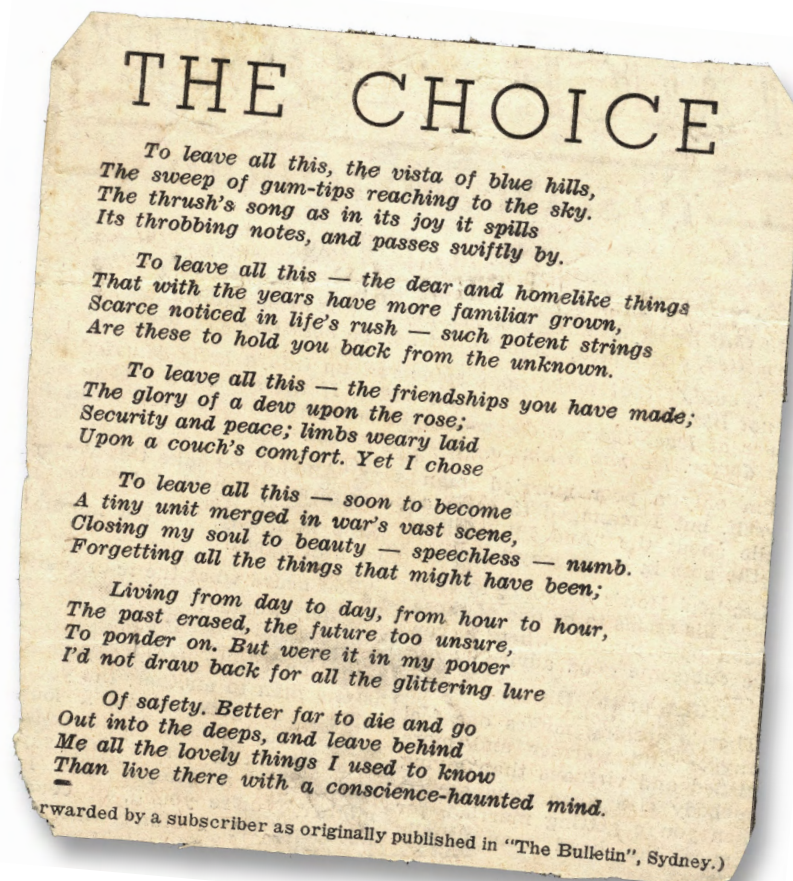
I haven't been out much, Darling, or done anything to write about; only to the pictures, and most of them are about three or more years old. I saw *The Wizard of Oz* last night. It wasn't so bad a show and it was rather well got together. Pictures are my main recreation here. I go every night I'm not working.

I'm hoping I don't stay in Palestine any longer than possible. It's far too cold for me and it doesn't warm up in the daytime either, worse luck.

Well, precious Love, I hope this letter finds you as well as it leaves me. Give my love to your mother and father, also Evelyn and the kids, and also to all of my folk. Tell them I'm in the best of health.

*All my love and kisses to you, Sweet Heart*  
*from yours ever truly*  
SOLDIER NED

1. The 2/15 moved into Kilo 89, a camp a couple of miles north of Gaza, on 3 February.





## *I'm enclosing a piece of poetry*

P.S. I'm enclosing a piece of poetry  
I hope you will find it  
interesting.

**Opposite Left:** Dawn and Ned's brother, Clive, at the Wynnum pool just after Ned left for overseas.  
[Dawn, DF47, 1941]

**Opposite right:** The poem Ned enclosed as a P.S. with his letter of 22nd February 1941, the first letter in which Ned refers to himself as fiancé.

QX.3199. P.C. G. E. Llewellyn-Smith.

D. Coy. 2/15 Bn. A.I.F. Abroad.

22nd Feb. 41.

To My Dearest Sweet Heart.

Well, at last, Darling.

I've received your welcome letter. I thought you must

have forgotten me as it seems such a long time since your first. Darling, I can see you will have to write more often. I won't be satisfied with anything under two a week from now on, so sharpen up your pencils and show me what you can do. There are two mail days here a week, so I'll be expecting one each time. You won't disappoint a poor lonely soldier, will you, Dear? I don't suppose I can really growl, considering you have been the only one to write so far. I haven't received any from home yet, so will you please wake them up.

Darling, I suppose you often wonder what I do in my spare time over here. I'm sorry, Dearest, I can't tell you anything of what I do, and there is nothing else really to talk about. I'm what you'd call "stumped" for a subject to write about, which makes writing more or less a task to steer clear of, except, of course, when it's to you, my Precious.

Sweet Heart, I have to close this letter for the night as it's getting late and I can't burn the midnight oil here. Goodnight, Precious, and sweet dreams.

24.2.1941 – Back again, Dawn darling. Mail day was yesterday and nothing for me again. I can see I'll have to resign myself to my fate and wait till you all remember to write more often, and not think that because I'm away over here I'm not worth writing to.

I went for a trip a couple of days ago and passed through a place called Jaffa. It's not so very big, but it's interesting. I can't tell you much as I didn't stop there, just passed through. While up that way I visited the biggest orange orchard in Palestine and the second biggest in the world, or so I'm told. Everywhere I go there are orange plantations and oranges. You'd be surprised at the amount even on one tree alone. There is a terrible lot of waste, too, as they can't be sold because of this blasted war.

Well, Darling, news is finished because there is none. Give my love to all at home and tell them I'm still okay, though a little stiff and sore after a little stroll I took over the sand today.

26.2.1941 – Darling, this letter is being written in relays. I hope you don't mind, but it really can't be helped as I'm not the master of my fate. Matter of fact, Sweet, by rights I shouldn't be writing now as I've some other things I should be attending to.

I'm sorry about George Burns. I was thinking of writing home to find out just where he was when your letter arrived. It brings things home to one when a person you know goes out like that. It caused me to do some deep thinking.

Well, Dawn, I'll have to close now as I have to get back to my job. Wishing you the best of everything, Sweet Heart.

From your ever loving Fiance.  
Ned.

## “Killed in Action”

—:o:—

### TROOPER GEORGE BURNS

THE STARK realities of the World War were brought vividly home to residents of Wondai and district on Friday, when Mr. and Mrs. R.L. Burns received a telegram advising that their son George had been “Killed in Action” and a gloom spread throughout a wide area as publicity was given to the sad announcement.

**Sorrow, however, was tempered with pride in the circumstance – for George, of the Tank Corps of the Reconnaissance Regiment, had met his death while in the front line of the fully victorious attack against the Italians in the Bardia region, where the men of the 2nd A.I.F. added further lustre to the undimmed record of our “Diggers”.**

One of the finest types of young Australian manhood and popular with all with whom he came in contact, George enlisted shortly after outbreak of war in 1939. His transport left Sydney early in January last year after he had spent Christmas in Wondai on final leave. His parents had retired from their well-known “Avondale” property at North Mondure to live in Wondai after George’s enlistment, and also enlistment of his brother Bill in the R.A.A.F.

In a letter – one of many received by his parents and all of which were most interesting and informative – George advised of arrival in the Middle East in February. That the secret of the transport’s destination was well kept is best illustrated by the fact that none of the troops, right up until disembarkation, knew other than that they were bound for England.

In Palestine the troops had nearly 12 months of intensive training and George was drafted to a Tank Corps, the work of which he entered into enthusiastically.

In the last letter received by his parents, written on Boxing Day, he told of his life in the front-line trenches in Egypt. Shortly after he wrote this letter the attack on Bardia was launched, the brilliant success of which will forever be featured in history. The tanks were in the forefront of the attack, flattening the barbed-wire entanglements and making openings, which the infantry used so effectively.

The marvel is that so few of the spearhead of the attack paid the supreme sacrifice. George was fated to be one of them and he passed to Valhalla on January 3rd, the day after his 24th birthday.

Citizens of the district accord heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved relatives, whilst sharing with them the pride that a “dinkum Aussie” played to the full his part in the maintenance of those democratic principles which are of even greater value than life itself.

At a suitable interval at the Wondai pictures on Saturday night, in response to a request screened by the management, the patrons stood for one minute in silence in honour of the memory of a gallant citizen who had paid the supreme sacrifice. The silence was followed by singing of the National Anthem.

Throughout Friday the Australian flag at the Memorial Hall was flown at half mast.

*South Burnett Times: 23 Jan 1941*

**Opposite:** George at the Wondai Showground. The man standing in the background is his father, RL Burns.

*[Guy Burns, GB11, 1939]*



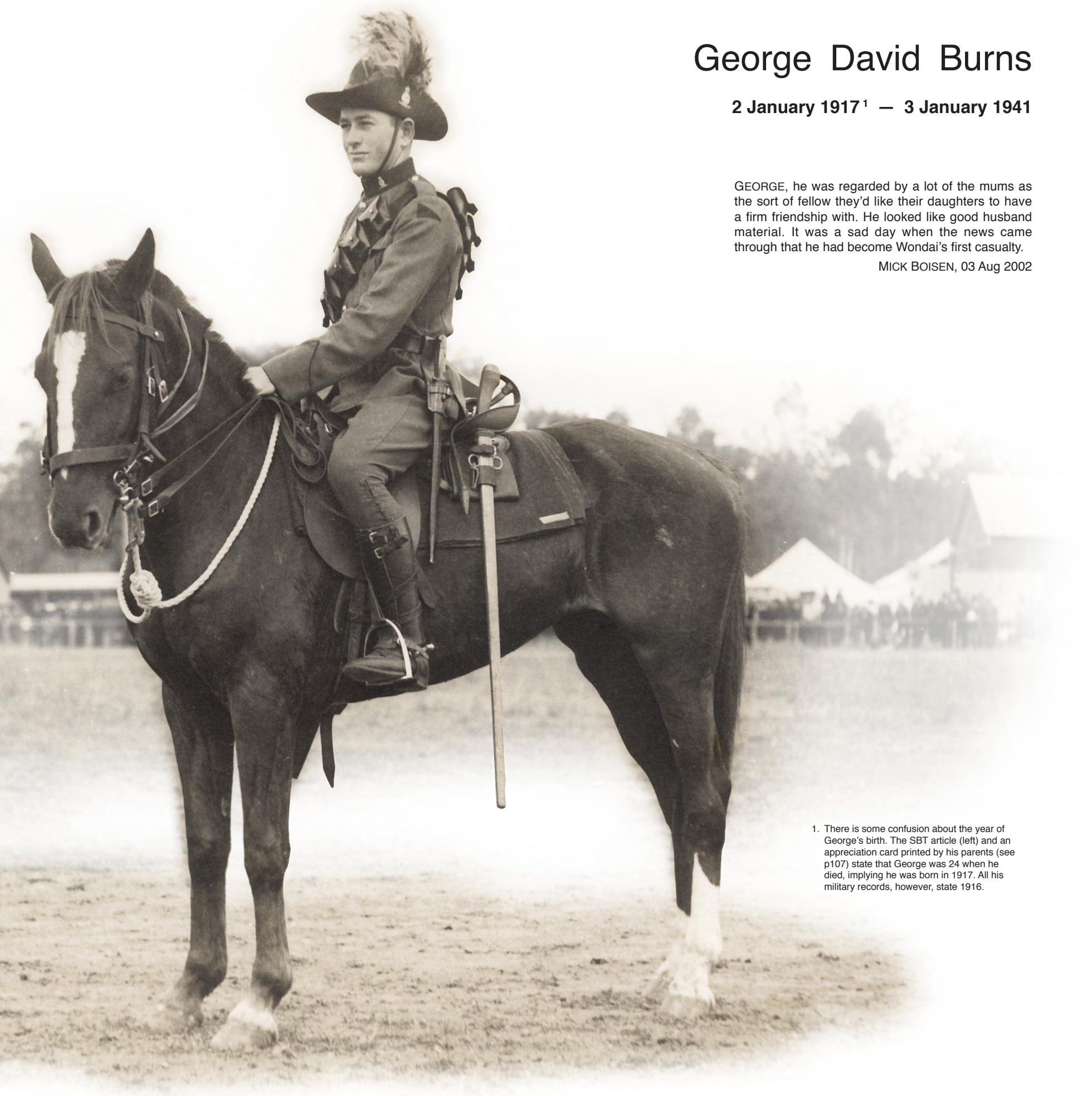


# George David Burns

2 January 1917<sup>1</sup> — 3 January 1941

GEORGE, he was regarded by a lot of the mums as the sort of fellow they'd like their daughters to have a firm friendship with. He looked like good husband material. It was a sad day when the news came through that he had become Wondai's first casualty.

MICK BOISEN, 03 Aug 2002



1. There is some confusion about the year of George's birth. The SBT article (left) and an appreciation card printed by his parents (see p107) state that George was 24 when he died, implying he was born in 1917. All his military records, however, state 1916.





6<sup>th</sup> Div. Recce Regt.  
A.I.F. Camp  
Ingleburn  
N.S.W.

Dear Max & Mary: Well how are you all, I  
suppose you are still hard at work.

I have had quite an exciting time these last few months. After a really wonderful send-off at Wondai, the four of us were farewelled at the train. I was presented with a bonzer wristlet watch from the public and an ever-sharp pencil from the Light Horse boys, and on top of that a big street march from the shire office to the station, led by the band, the Light Horse, and then the infantry, amidst nearly a thousand people. I think it was the hardest time of my life saying goodbye to all my pals and everybody in general. I was very pleased when at last the train moved out.

We went from Wondai to Maryborough and then, as in Wondai, we had another street march – there were about 80 of us by then – and we were entertained at a banquet by the Lord Mayor of Maryborough. We went from there to the AIF camp at Redbank, 20 miles from Brisbane. We stopped there for about three weeks and in that time I was drafted into my present unit, the Reconnaissance Regiment (or Light Tank Corps). It is one of the specialised units of the army. Besides having to learn Morse Code and signals and half a dozen other things, you have to be a driver, a gunner operator and a running mechanic, so you can see it's not all fun. It is a very dangerous job. Still, our fate is mapped out for us I suppose, so if I am going to die I may as well die this way as any other.

On leaving Brisbane for the south we had another street march, and being the first division of the new<sup>1</sup> AIF to leave Queensland, we were cheered by thousands as we marched through Queen St and out to the interstate railway station.

It's really marvellous the men you meet. They come from all walks of life: bank managers and clerks, big cattle men, school teachers, business men; every kind of job you can imagine.

From Brisbane we had a special train and the whole trip was very pleasant. Coming across the Hawkesbury River early in the morning was a sight I will never forget.

We arrived at Ingleburn<sup>2</sup> about 10 o'clock on a Thursday morning. The camp is very large and very modern. There are 6000 men in training here and the buildings are spread over a couple of hundred acres.

We went to Sydney the first weekend and walked across the harbour bridge. We also went up the tower of the bridge and had a look at Sydney from the top. We had some photos taken up in the tower so I will send you one. After having a good look around Sydney we went to Manly Beach by boat and spent the afternoon there.

Last Wednesday night we also spent in Sydney and went to Luna Park on the ferry. It is a wonderful sight by night, well-worth seeing if ever you go to Sydney.

I think we will be sailing early in January so I might be going back to Wondai for Christmas on final leave. As far as we know our regiment will be going to Canada to finish its training. I suppose we will see a few different countries before we finish. We hope to anyway.

Well, I think I will have to close now. Hoping this finds you all well.

Wishing you all a merry Christmas & happy  
New Year George



# Three Letters From George

**Opposite:** George in Egypt.  
[Robin Burns, R43, 1940]

The letter is undated. It was written to his brother, Max, in November or December 1939. Marj was Max's wife.

**Right:** George (second from left) and mates on leave in Sydney.  
[Guy Burns, GB47, November 1939]

**Below:** "After a really wonderful send-off at Wondai, the four of us were farewelled at the train."

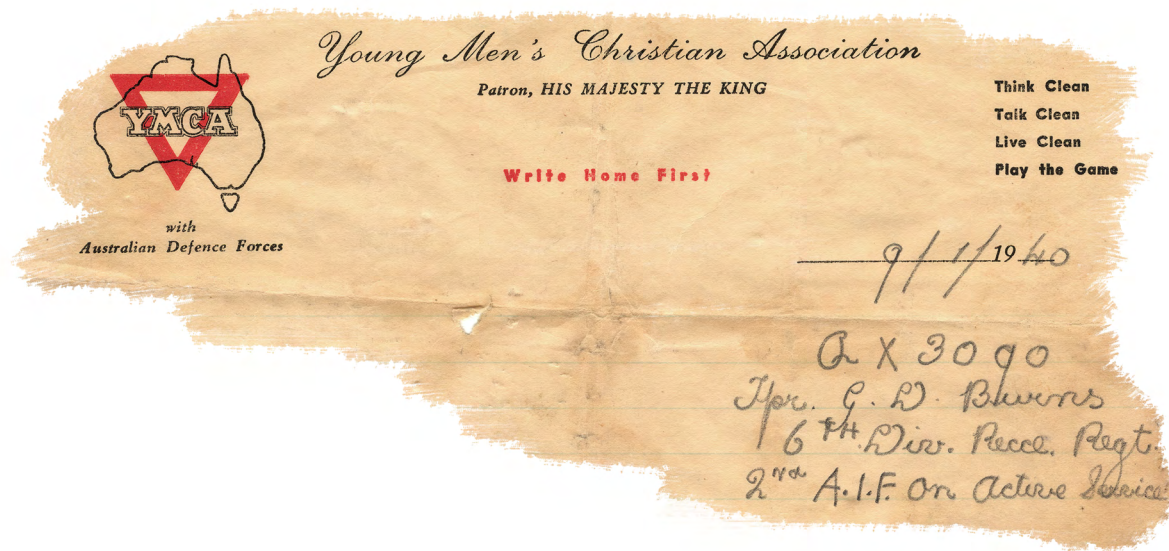
George (third from left) and his three fellow enlistees from Wondai, at the Wondai Showground.

[Guy Burns, GB49, October 1939]

1. By 'new', George means the 2nd AIF, formed in response to Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 3 September 1939. The 1st AIF was raised during World War I and consisted of five divisions. The 6th Division was the first division formed for the 2nd AIF.
2. With the creation of the 2nd AIF new camp facilities were required across Australia, one of which was erected at Ingleburn, 30 miles southwest of Sydney, on 650 acres of farmland.







DEAR MAX AND MARJ – I received your welcome letter last week and was pleased to hear you had plenty of rain. Since last writing I have been home to Wondai on final leave and at present I am on board a troop ship in Sydney Harbour waiting until the convoy is ready to move out. We embarked at 8 o'clock this morning and hope to sail tomorrow. The ship we are on is a huge overseas liner and the cabins have not been altered at all. I am in a first-class cabin and I can tell you it is a marvellous boat and it's hard to believe that soldiers could be lucky enough to travel in such a modern well-equipped ship. We are looking forward to a good trip and I will tell you later on where we end up. At present we don't know where we are going, and wouldn't be allowed to tell you if we did. We are being escorted over and I think there are about 1400 lads on this boat and about 6000 troops going in the convoy altogether.

I suppose you know brother Bill has joined the ground staff of the RAAF. He should end up in a good job.

I am sorry I couldn't get up to see you before I left, but it was impossible as we only had six days' leave. However, I will make it my business to spend a few weeks with you on my return. In the meantime I will drop you a line from different places and tell you of my experiences.

Well for the present I think I will have to close, hoping this finds you well. Wishing you a happy New Year. I give my love to Tilly. (1) (2) Hope George

PLEASE WRITE ON BOTH SIDES

1. "Tilly" is George's niece, Max and Marj's eldest child, Joy, then aged 6.

2. The signature in smudged ink is the censor's.





QX3090  
*Tpr. G.D. Burns*  
*6th Div. Recce Regt*  
*2nd AIF Abroad*  
*Saturday, 9 March 1940*



**Above:** RL Burns and sons Bill (left) and George, strolling on a Sydney foreshore. Dated as March 1940, but that is incorrect as George left Australia in January. Judging by the civilian clothes, the photo would have been taken before George and Bill enlisted.  
*[Robin Burns, R30, ca 1940]*

DEAR MARJ AND MAX – Well, I suppose you have heard before now that I am in Palestine. We didn't know until we were halfway over that we were coming here. The first contingent of the Australian forces arrived about three weeks ago and so far we are enjoying life very much. I like our unit. We have a good lot of officers and the life is a carefree, happy one.

The voyage over was a very good experience and I enjoyed every minute of it. After five weeks of sailing in first-class cabins on an Orient Line boat I was sorry to have to leave it. I had no seasickness, and taking things all round it was a very quiet trip. We thought that we might have had a bit of trouble on the way over, but we didn't sight any enemy submarines or battleships.

I like Palestine. It is a very interesting country and I think we should be able to have a good time here. I hope to visit Jerusalem and Bethlehem and numerous other historic places. We had our first leave on a Sunday about a fortnight ago and we went to Tel Aviv for the day. Tel Aviv is one of the largest towns in this country and we spent an enjoyable day there. The city itself is one of the most modern in Palestine, and being only 30 years old it has no old buildings. I have filled five albums of photos of Palestine and have a very good collection<sup>1</sup>. I have forwarded them home to Wondai, so if you are in Wondai at any time they should prove very interesting to you.

I bought quite a lot of souvenirs for Mother today and it is really marvellous how cheap things are here. I bought five tablecloths and a table centre, worked in all the colours of the rainbow, for less than 10/-. We can buy khaki shirts for 3/6 and shorts for about 4/- and they are as good as what we paid twice as much for in Sydney. Later on, if funds permit, I will send you some souvenirs of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

The people of Palestine are Jews and Arabs and so far we are getting on all right with them. The Jews own all of Tel Aviv and seem to have a mint of money, whereas the Arabs are a very primitive race and live in mud villages and have no machinery of any kind for working their land. It is a common sight to see a wooden plough being drawn by a camel, and it is amazing how much cultivation the Arabs do with such means. Oranges thrive here and we can buy 20 for threepence. They are first class oranges and we nearly live on them. The land is very fertile and if the rainfall was regular I think it would grow anything.

There are no such things as fences in the country because there is no timber for posts. The only fences we see are prickly-pear hedges and they make a very good fence when the pear is planted close together.

It is a relief for me to know that Mother and Dad have left Avondale and moved to Wondai. They should have done that years ago instead of working the farm as they did.

I suppose Bill is on his way to Canada by this time – that is if the RAAF is going to Canada. I hope he likes his job. It should be a wonderful experience for him.

Well, I think I will have to close now as it's near bedtime. Hoping you are both well and that the children are in good health.

<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, George's collection of photos may have been lost. None of his friends or relatives I spoke to recollect ever seeing it.

*Cheeres*  
*Love George*

*[Signature]*



GEORGE AND I were pretty good friends. We enjoyed each other's company. He used to ride his motor bike out to our farm at Cloyna for the family get-togethers we always had on Sunday night.

We were boyfriend-girlfriend really, but we never did get serious. That was me. I didn't want a permanent boyfriend at that stage.

MARJORIE ARNDT  
19 Oct 2002

MARJORIE ARNDT lived near us when Ned and I were kids. I was about 14 and she was about five. I only knew her in her very young days, but later on in life when I was married and had a couple of kids, I met her again when she was going with George. The war broke them up. George enlisted and I never heard of Marjorie Arndt after that. She was a fine looking woman.

MARJ BURNS  
(Ned's Sister)



**Left:** Marjorie Arndt aged 21.  
[John Evans, EJ02, 1939]

**Below:** Two Queenslanders, George Burns and Eric Lowe, taken outside their tent in Palestine.  
(Writing on back of photo)  
[Judy Burns, BJ006, 1940]

**Opposite:** George in 1939, posing on his Royal Enfield bike at the Arndt farm, Cloyna (near Wondai).  
Marjorie Arndt's brother, Gordon, behind.  
George sold the bike to Gordon when he enlisted.  
[Marjorie Arndt, AM03, 1939]

"George bought himself a nice little Royal Enfield motor bike and he used to come out visiting our farm on it. I think he only had it about six months and he enlisted in the army. So, seeing that my sister Marjorie and George were good mates, he let me have it for half price.

Now, I should tell you of a coincidence – the day George got killed, 3rd January 1941, I got smashed on that motorbike." (Gordon Arndt)

## Died In Action



Trooper George William Burns, of Wondai, who was killed in action at Bardia. Trooper Burns was the son of Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Burns, and had lived all his life in the Wondai district. He enlisted soon after war began, and reached the Middle East last February.



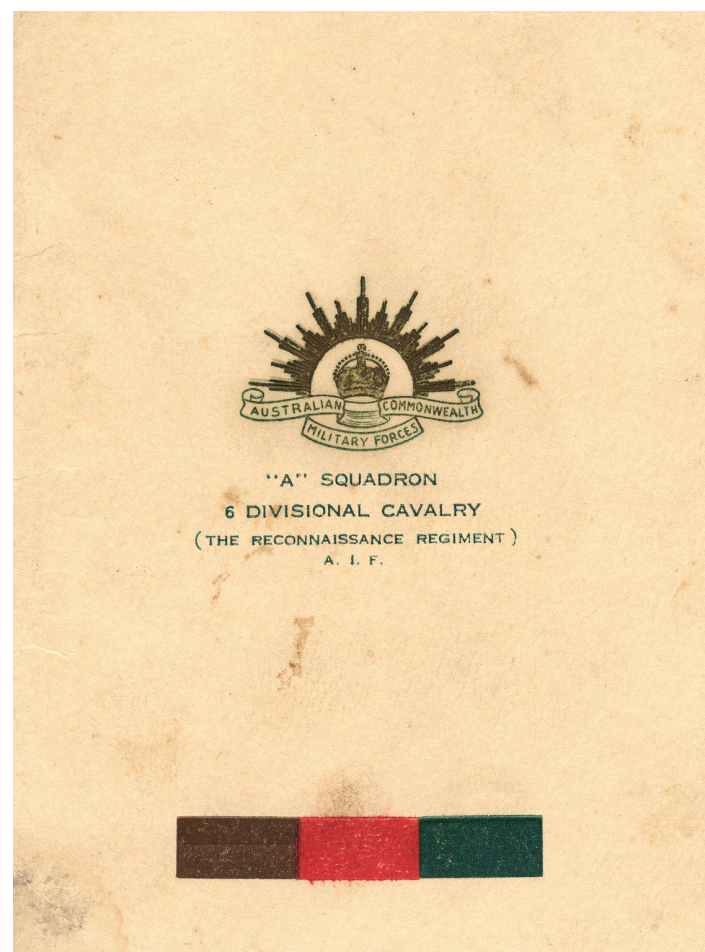
South Burnett Times: undated.

Note: George's middle name was David, not William.





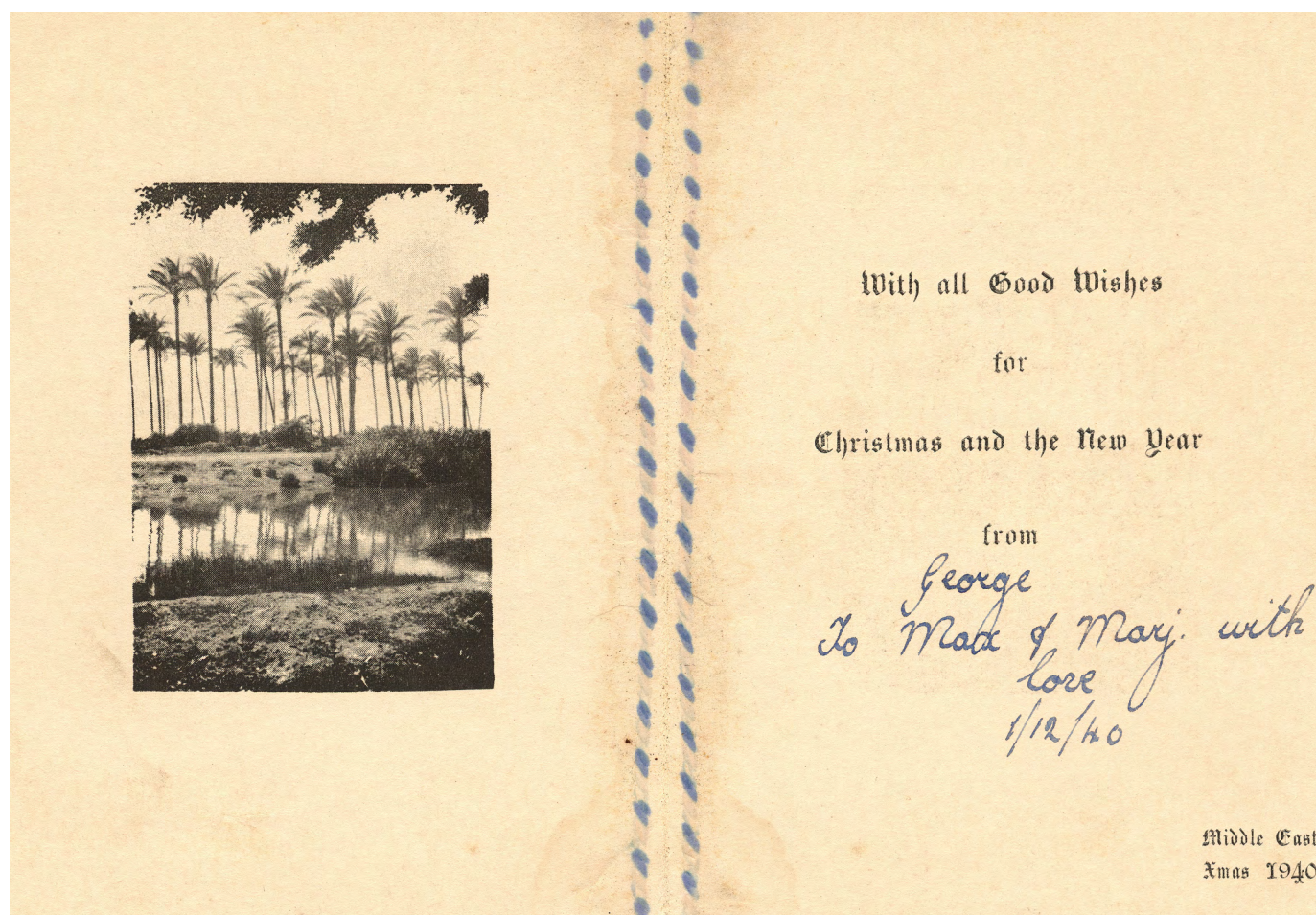




George, QX3090, was a member of the first armoured unit to be created in the Australian military. The unit was formed at Ingleburn (a training camp outside Sydney) on 3 November 1939. The unit became the *6th Australian Division Cavalry Regiment* on 8th June 1940 (George was in Squadron A), but was originally called the *6th Division Reconnaissance Regiment*, hence the word "reconnaissance" on the card above.

Each of the Australian divisions (6th, 7th, 9th) which served in the Middle East had a reconnaissance regiment, whose role, in addition to battle, was to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance on behalf of its division. At full strength each of the cavalry regiments had 28 light tanks, 44 machine-gun carriers and some 450 men.





**Opposite and above:** Cover and insert of Christmas card sent by George to his brother and sister-in-law.

**Opposite:** George in Palestine.  
[Judy Burns, BJ03, 1940]



# The Capture of Bardia



THE 6TH DIVISION Cavalry Regiment, of which George Burns was a part, came into being in November 1939. Two months later, in January 1940, it was sent to the Middle East. The regiment disembarked in Egypt and immediately went to Palestine where it joined the rest of the 6th Division and began training with machine-gun carriers and light tanks. The Australian soldiers had little training before they left home and were not prepared for battle when they arrived in the Middle East. They spent almost a year training in Palestine and Egypt before they saw action against the enemy in Operation Compass beginning in December 1940. In that operation, a major offensive against the Italians, they joined British forces in the Egyptian desert to chase the Italians out of Egypt and back into Libya.

At the beginning of World War 2, Libya was an Italian colony. On 10 June 1940, Italy declared war on the Allies and began a military build-up in Libya in preparation for a move east towards British-held Egypt. From its positions inside Libya, the Italian Army thrust into Egypt on 13 September 1940 and advanced approximately 60 miles in three days. On September 17, the advance stopped 10 miles beyond Sidi Barrani, where the Italians dug in, fortified their positions, and awaited reinforcements and supplies.

The loss of Sidi Barrani threatened British control of the Middle East, in particular the Suez Canal and supply routes to and from India, Southeast Asia and Australia. The Italians would have to be repelled from Egypt, and the campaign to do so was called Operation Compass, a combined effort involving British, Australian and Indian forces. The plan called for Sidi Barrani to be attacked on the second day of the operation and for the Italians to be pushed westwards, away from Egypt, along the Libyan coastline. Only British and Indian troops were involved in the attack on Sidi Barrani. Australians were not involved in the fighting until after 14 December when they relieved the Indian contingent.

On the nights of 7 and 8 December 1940 the British forces moved to their start positions, and on 9 December the attack began. Within hours of the battle's onset, several Italian positions were overrun (they were separated by large distances which meant they could not provide mutual support); an Italian General was killed; and 4000 Italian and Libyan soldiers were dead or captured. According to one account<sup>1</sup>:

The Italians were caught completely off guard and many did not even reach their tanks, including General Maletti, who was killed emerging from his dugout. They were slaughtered, and their vehicles destroyed by the British in less than 10 minutes.

1. [wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Compass](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass)



Derna •

Tobruk •

Bardia •

Sidi Barrani •

El Alamein •

**Trooper G. D. Burns in Egypt to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Burns, at Wondai, Qld.:**

"WE did the trip across the great Sinai Desert by road. Our huge convoy looked very well travelling along the sands. Crossing the canal was a very slow job, but on the other side were some beautiful parks and lawns, and it was very pleasing to see them after the desert trek.

"We crossed the Nile River, and it is a fair size, but just at present it is very dirty owing to floods in Abyssinia.

"The date is one of the main crops grown here, and one can see acres and acres of date palms. The natives sell dates round the camps, but I prefer them dried rather than fresh."

*In Jan 2 1940*  
Signaller  
South Burnett Times: 02 Nov 1940.  
George is describing his movements from Palestine to Egypt in preparation for Operation Compass against the Italians.

100 miles



On 10 December Sidi Barrani was attacked and the town was captured by nightfall. The next day Egypt was in Allied hands, as were 38,300 prisoners and 73 tanks. A week after the start of Operation Compass, at a cost to the Allies of 133 killed, 387 wounded and 8 missing, all enemy forces had been cleared from Egypt.

BARDIA, IN 1940, was a small town on the Mediterranean coast of Libya, about 20 miles from the Egyptian border. It had been developed as a military post during Italy's colonisation of Libya before World War 2, and both the harbour and the town had been fortified.

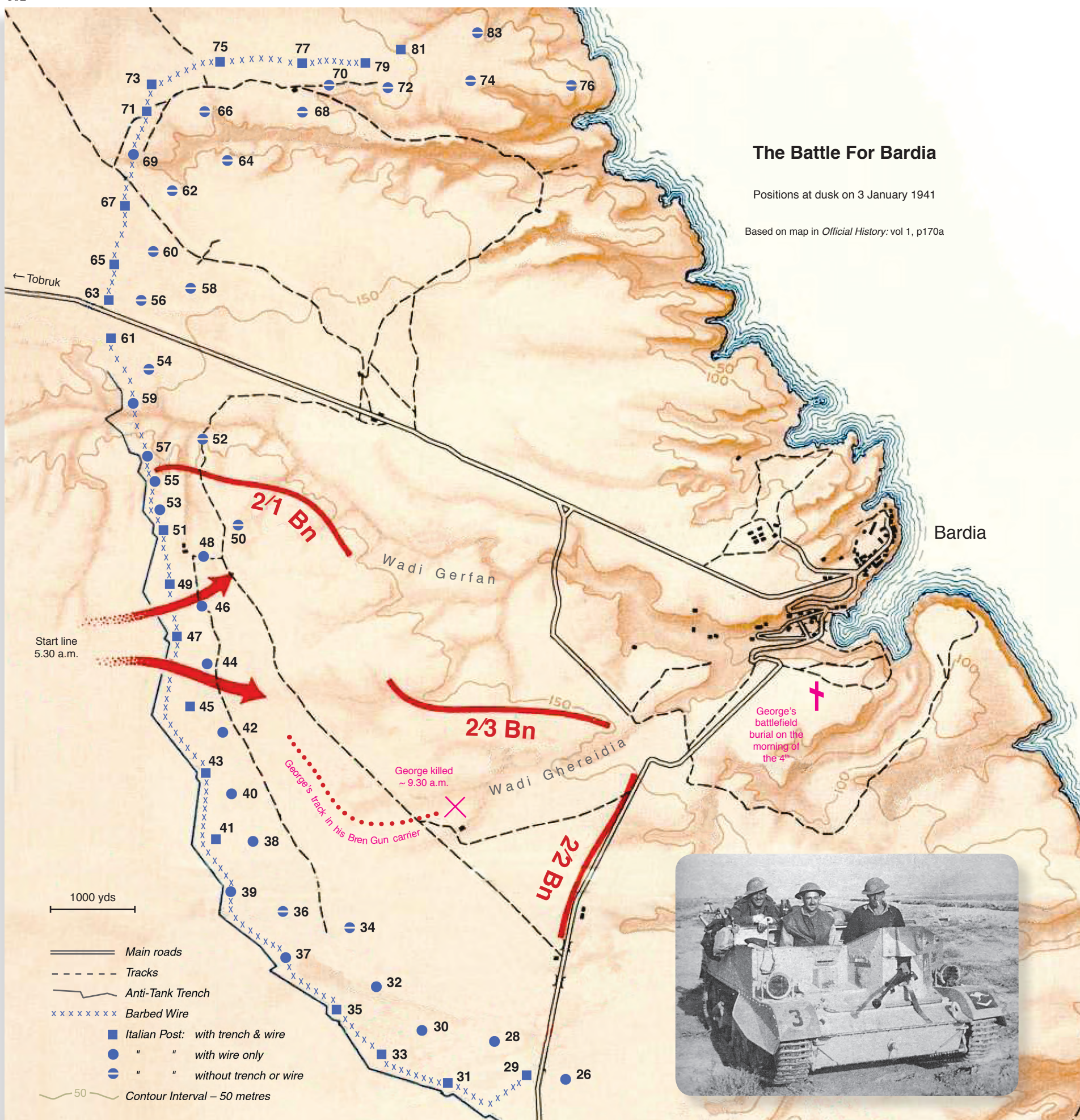
After their withdrawal from Egypt, the Italians retreated inside Bardia's defences, which included an antitank ditch, extensive barbed-wire fences, and a double row of concrete bunkers along an 18-mile perimeter.

At dawn on 3 January 1941 the offensive against Bardia began, launched by the Australian 6th Division with British support. Italian morale was already broken, worn down by weeks of aerial and naval bombardment, and by nightfall the Australians had penetrated 2 miles on a 9-mile front (see map next page) and captured 8000 prisoners. One after another, Italian units were surrounded, cut off from supply, and defeated.

Bardia, and about 40,000 prisoners, capitulated to the Australians on January 5. The fighting resulted in 326 wounded Australians and 130 dead. One of the dead, killed in action on the first day of the battle, was my great uncle, George Burns.









# The Death of George

Edited extracts, *Official History*: vol 1, chs 7 & 8

ALONG THE Libyan coast from the Egyptian border to Benghazi, Libya resembles the western desert of Egypt, except between Derna and the fertile farm lands of Benghazi. There, on the wooded northern slopes of a tableland 150 miles from east to west, enough rain falls to make farming possible. Apart from the tableland, the desert is low and arid, receiving only enough rain to support scattered clumps of drought-resistant camel bush.

On the Mediterranean coast, the desert descends to the sea in a series of low cliffs (escarpments). Erosion by wind and water has carved steep ravines into the escarpment forming what are called wadis. It was between the great sand sea to the south and the Mediterranean to the north, amongst the wadis of the coastal area, that the desert campaigns of North Africa were fought.

Fierce winds have eroded the floor of the desert, and in some parts it is so smooth and firm that a motor car can drive over it at high speed without discomfort; in others it is serrated by small valleys or covered with stones. There are the occasional potholes of soft sand, but the continuous sand dunes characteristic of the Libyan desert proper do not, in this part, begin until 100 miles or more from the coast. Few tracts of country anywhere presented fewer natural obstacles to the free movement of military vehicles; they could be manoeuvred here as if in a great arena.

On the other hand, the dust and sand caused rapid wear and tear; and winds, drought, dust and extremes of temperature made campaigning uncomfortable, even for troops well-supplied with vehicles and gear. The wind might blow so strongly that it whipped up the fine dust until, for perhaps a whole day, a vehicle 5 yards away would be invisible. In winter the nights were bitter, yet the days could be uncomfortably hot, and little shelter from cold, heat or wind was to be found. Yet to soldiers the desert offered two advantages: it was dry and free from disease, and the absence of towns and settled people over all the battlefield until Derna was reached meant that there were no refugees and no danger that civilians would be killed or wounded.

THE SUDDENNESS of the Italian collapse at Sidi Barrani had persuaded at least some of the Allied command staff that, in Libya, the war was virtually over – a reaction that was perhaps to be expected from men who had planned and witnessed the first Allied victory on land in a war which was more than a year old. Intelligence officers had summed up the situation: “There is no doubt that the Italian Army in Libya as an effective force is finished” and they considered that there was every indication that Bardia would be abandoned. But they were wrong. There were an estimated 18,000 to 20,000 troops occupying Bardia by Christmas and it became obvious that the Italians intended to hold the fortress.

The Italians had fortified Bardia, at great expense of labour, steel and concrete, by digging a defensive line in the form of an arc 18 miles in length. The arc consisted of an almost continuous antitank ditch, and behind it a double line of underground posts, the posts in the front line being 800 yards apart and linked by rows of barbed wire. They were armed with one or two 47 mm guns and from two to four machine-guns, and offered almost complete protection against any but the heaviest of shells. Four hundred yards behind the forward line lay a second arc of posts. The posts were numbered consecutively from south to north, odd numbers for the outer posts and even numbers for the inner, and the numbers were marked on the posts themselves, a convenience for an attacker because he knew exactly where he was.

On the 20th December, the Australian 2/2nd and 2/3rd battalions from the 6th Division went into position about 7,000 yards from the front-line Italian posts. The following night, each of the battalions sent forward a patrol to find and measure the antitank ditch and the wire, and discover

whether the posts were occupied. The patrol from the 2/2nd moved quietly, their boots covered by small bags of sand to muffle their steps. They reached a position about 30 yards from the dimly-seen ditch, beyond which they could make out the barbed wire obstacle. As two men from the patrol were preparing to cross, a party of Italians appeared, talking and laughing, and established itself in the ditch. The men withdrew without having been detected.

The 2/3rd Battalion's patrol set out on a similar mission. Dressed in greatcoats, they steered with the aid of a compass, and, gauging the distance by counting their paces, marched 7,000 yards and reached the antitank ditch at 11 p.m. The crescent moon had risen and they could see the wire beyond the ditch. They measured it at 15 feet wide and 3 feet in depth. Thence they moved to the wire, which they found to be a “double-apron” – a fence about 12 feet wide with a sloping face on each side. A few yards away an Italian sentry shouted “*Chi va là?*”<sup>1</sup> The Australians promptly went to ground. With much chattering and shouting the Italians threw grenades, fired rifles and then machine-guns, and finally launched artillery at such close range that the crack of firing and of bursting shell were almost simultaneous. The order was given to withdraw to the cover of the ditch and the men moved stealthily back without a casualty. After 20 minutes the firing died and the patrol returned the way it had come.

In the following weeks, patrols went forward each night. Unnoticed by the Italians they continued to measure the ditch and wire at various points; or else were detected and drew a deafening fire from the posts. When this occurred the men merely lay still, sometimes for two hours, until the fusillade ceased, and then made their way back to their company's area. Eventually, men who went out on patrol wore sandshoes rather than muffled boots; and because they might have to lie motionless for hours at a time, dressed warmly, with sweaters over their jackets, balaclavas under steel helmets, and mittens, scarves and long woollen underpants if they had them.

Although the Italians spent much ammunition, there were no casualties among the Australian night patrols, nor was the hostile artillery fire effective.

ON 28TH DECEMBER, at a conference at headquarters, the plan of attack was outlined. Zero hour for Bardia was fixed at 5.30 a.m. on 3 January 1941:

- ✱ One battalion (the 2/1st) would attack before dawn from a starting line 1,000 yards from posts 45, 46 and 47. After the engineers had broken down the antitank ditch and cut gaps in the barbed wire, four troops of tanks would pass through the openings at 6.50 a.m. when it became light enough for their crews to see. One of these tank troops would join the 2/1st and advance north and northeast, enlarging the breach.
- ✱ The remaining tanks, and the 2/2nd Battalion, would move south and mop up the posts on that side of the breach.
- ✱ Following behind the tanks, the 2/3rd Battalion would advance through the breach to the edge of Wadi Gerfan, accompanied by the 6th Cavalry Regiment<sup>2</sup> in its Bren Gun carriers, which would deploy and form a link between the 2/1st on the left and the 2/2nd on the right.

The three battalions and the tanks were to be shielded by artillery fire. Ninety-six guns and howitzers were to fire on posts 42-49 while the troops advanced.

On the night of 1 January 1941, in preparation for the assault, aircraft dropped 20,000 pounds of bombs on Bardia, and the next night 30,000 pounds. Next day General Mackay visited each of the attacking battalions. The younger leaders were excited, but determined that in their first battle they should not fail. To one of them it was like “the feeling before an exam”. Afterwards, their letters

**Opposite:** A Bren Gun carrier of the type driven by George, outside Bardia, 1941. The emblem of the 6th Division is on the right mudguard: a kangaroo above a boomerang on a black square.

1. *Chi va là?* (“Who is that?”) is what an Italian military sentinel asks of any person who is approaching. The complete sentence is *Alto là chi va là: “Stop and identify yourself”*.

2. George Burns' regiment.

and comments revealed how conscious they were that this was the test of their equality with the 1st AIF in which their fathers had served. One diarist wrote on 2 January:

*Tonight is the night. By this time tomorrow the fate of Bardia should be sealed. Everyone is happy, expectant, eager. Old timers say the spirit is the same as in the last war. Each truck load was singing as we drove to the assembly point in the moonlight. All ranks carried a rum issue against the bleak morning. At 1930 hrs we passed the tanks, assembled against the skyline like a fleet of battle-cruisers, pennants flying. Infantry moved up all night, rugged, jesting, moon-etched against the darker background of no-man's-land. The B.M. and party had taped the start line<sup>1</sup>. Historic – for it is the start line of the Australian soldier in this war.*

The 2/1st Battalion arrived at the assembly area near the start line at 1.30 a.m. Some slept there on the ground until roused at 2.30; others remained awake watching the bombers attacking Bardia and the tracer shells climbing into the sky. The men were heavily laden; each wore his woollen uniform and most had a greatcoat with the skirt turned back to allow freedom of movement. They wore steel helmets and had respirators hanging on their chests. And in pouches, pockets and haversack, 150 rounds of ammunition, one or two grenades, and three days' rations of tinned beef and biscuits. They set out carrying picks and shovels, but the combined load was too heavy and most of the tools were abandoned. On his back each man wore a patch of white cloth so that the following troops would recognise their own men, a device first used by Australians at Lone Pine in August 1915. It would be so cold waiting through the night that most had put on (or left on, because few had fully undressed for a week or more) woollen underclothes and sweaters. Some wore scarves and balaclavas.

At 2.30 a.m. the men of the 2/1st ate a meal and drank their rum, and at 4.16 a.m. the leading companies began to move forward to the start line. It was pitch dark. A few minutes after the leaders arrived at the start line, and while the rear platoons were still moving forward, the barrage opened (at 5.30 a.m.) with a sudden sustained hammering of guns which lit up the horizon with a line of flashes and streaks of light. The sudden noise, the flash of guns, and the sound of shells going overhead and crashing in the darkness had an exhilarating effect, dispelling the tension and producing excitement and confidence. As the men advanced, they began shouting defiance at the enemy, the guns drowning their voices.

About 100 yards short of the antitank ditch, the line was halted and parties of engineers moved forward to blow a path through the barbed-wire. When the infantrymen heard the explosions they rose to their feet and scrambled forward

into the ditch, whose sides the engineers were already breaking down with picks and shovels. Once through the wire, the two leading platoons charged forward. In less than half an hour, and while it was still dark, the Italian line was breached at posts 44, 45, 46, 48 and 49.

At 6.35 a.m. in the half-light, the 2/2nd Battalion (accompanied by 23 tanks) moved towards the gap in the wire. As the infantrymen marched forward they sang<sup>2</sup> and smoked.

The 2/3rd Battalion, following the 2/1st and 2/2nd, moved through the gap in the Italian line at 7.50 a.m. So dense was the dust that some platoon commanders could not see the platoons on each side of them, and steered by compass. Beyond the line, the three leading companies of the 2/3rd fanned out and advanced into the dust and machine-gun fire to the edge of the Gerfan Ravine (Wadi Gerfan), as fast as their burden of heavy clothing, weapons, ammunition and rations would allow.

By 9.20 a.m. the 2/3rd battalion was overlooking Wadi Gerfan, and a little later were in touch with the 2/1st on their left. On their right, between the 2/3rd and 2/2nd, were Major MacArthur-Onslow's Bren Gun carriers extending along the high ground at the head of Wadi Ghereidia. The men driving the carriers had gone into action with the 2/3rd, then wheeled to the right. Hidden in dust stirred up by shell bursts and by the churning of their own tracks, they had advanced to where the road crosses the head of Wadi Ghereidia. There they were shelled by the Italians from about a mile ahead. One carrier was hit in the advance, and another was now hit near the road<sup>3</sup>.



1. BM: On the night of 29-30 December, Brigadier-Major Campbell and a night patrol scouted to a point in the antitank ditch midway between Posts 45 and 47. Pacing back 1000 yards from the ditch, the patrol marked the position of the centre of the start line by tying rifle-cleaning rags on to bushes, making an accurate landmark in the almost featureless desert.

2. Several war correspondents stated that the Australians as they advanced at Bardia sang *The Wizard of Oz*, from a recent fairy-tale film of that name. The story has been repeated in many writings since then.  
The truth appears to be that, while the men of the 2/2nd Battalion were moving forward from the start line after the barrage had begun (making silence no longer necessary) a sergeant set some of the troops singing *South of the Border*, which was probably the most popular song in both Australian and British Armies in 1940 and 1941.  
Later that day when a group of Fleet St war correspondents arrived, they met Capt P. J. Woodhill (2/2 Battalion) who mentioned that the men had sung as they advanced. "What did they sing?" asked one correspondent. Woodhill, who had a puckish sense of humour, and was very weary, searched his mind for the most incongruous song he could think of and replied: "*The Wizard of Oz*".

3. The Bren Gun carrier hit near the road was the one occupied by George Burns. The situation is described in a little more detail in *To the Green Fields Beyond: The Story of the 6th Division Cavalry Commandos*: "One carrier had advanced forward of a road junction and came under direct fire. A hit by a 47 mm shell killed the gunner, Trooper G.D. Burns."





## HAMLET WITHOUT THE PRINCE

Edited extracts, *Official History*: vol 1, 203-205

THE AUSTRALIANS at Bardia had been set a task which would have tested the keenest and most experienced troops. After the battle, some Australian senior officers who had served in France in 1916-18 and were not present at the battle, made little of the Italian resistance and expressed anxiety lest the new Australian Imperial Force should be spoiled by easy victories. At many points, however, the Italians had fought hard.

And the Australians had been thoroughly trained, better perhaps than was generally realised throughout the division itself at the time, and were in splendid fettle. The division, particularly the junior staff and the company commanders, still had much to learn, but it is doubtful whether in the succeeding five years any Australian force was fitter for battle than the 6th Division at Bardia. The fact that it was a volunteer force meant that it attracted particularly keen and impetuous spirits both from the militia (whence nearly all the officers were drawn) and from the civilian population.

The senior commanders of the 6th Division had

been chosen from a large pool of leaders who had served with distinction in the 1st AIF. The younger officers had been schooled by such men in the kind of aggressive patrolling in which the 1st AIF had excelled, and in the doctrine that battles are won by attacking.

In almost every platoon were men whose fathers had served in the 1st AIF and who were resolved to prove themselves as formidable as their forebears. Rightly or wrongly they believed that the 1st AIF had been the finest force in the world in its day. To these men's consciousness of an exacting tradition was added a confidence which had grown steadily deeper during the training in Palestine and Egypt, and was the stronger because the standards there, in field exercises and in the schools, had been set by regular British troops for whose efficiency the Australians had a great admiration.

FOR 20 YEARS, one school of military writers had insisted that quick-firing weapons in the hands of men behind wire and concrete had made the

holding of prepared defences easy. But success of the Australians at Bardia demonstrated that there is no fortress so strong in its engineering that men of determination and cunning, and with weapons in their hands, cannot take it.

Another school had insisted that armoured tanks would decide the outcome of future battles.

At Bardia, however, the decisive work was done by ingenious and resolute foot soldiers, moving, at first, under cover of darkness close behind an artillery barrage which drove the enemy to shelter at the critical moment.

It was a victory for bold reconnaissance, for careful planning, for an artillery scheme which subdued the enemy's fire at the vital time, and for a rapid and continuing infantry assault which broke a gap in the enemy's line. Later, tanks followed the infantry in, then led them, preventing many casualties.

To ascribe the Bardia success either to tanks, as some writers have done, or to the artillery – and thereby leave out the foot soldiers – is to present Hamlet without the Prince.

**Below:** Australian infantry advancing on Bardia.  
[Image 134446, Australian War Memorial]

Although not a description of this particular photo, an infantry sergeant described the sight of Australians advancing on Bardia (*Official History*: vol 1, 167)

"I have a vivid recollection of seeing ourselves as the enemy might have seen us. Just at sunset on the 3rd, one of the Northumberland Fusiliers (a section of the Fusiliers was with us) called out: "Christ, look at this!" I looked around to see, almost silhouetted against the setting sun, a whole plain full of advancing infantry. The half light, the mass of equipment and the flapping greatcoat of every man, made them look really huge, while the perfect formation and dispersal, the steady advance, gave the impression of great numbers and of inevitability. It was merely one company of the 2/2nd Battalion, moving up towards us, but it was enough to impress even a man from the Northumberland. It is possible that other sights such as this, in the morning, had made an even greater impression on the Italians."





FUNDS MAY BE QUICKLY, SAFELY AND  
ECONOMICALLY TRANSFERRED BY  
**MONEY ORDER TELEGRAM.**  
(PLEASE TURN OVER.)

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.

## RECEIVED TELEGRAM

The first line of this telegram contains the following  
particulars in the order named.

Office of Origin.

Words.

Time Lodged.

No.

4 WONDAL 16 8-45am

T.G. 42

OFFICE DATE STAMP

Sent at

Ch'nl No.

By

Remarks.

Sch. C.2556.—10/1939.

To

MAX BURNS BILOELA N Q

This message has been received subject to the Post and Telegraph Act  
and Regulations.  
The time received at this office is shown at the end of the message.  
The date stamp indicates the date both of lodgment and of reception  
unless otherwise shown after the particulars of time lodged.

6365....

RECEIVED NEWS GEORGE KILLED IN ACTION 3rd JANUARY

R L BURNS -

935ajn

Above: Telegram dated 18 January 1941  
from George's father at Wondai  
to George's brother, Max, at Biloela.



Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Burns and Family  
appreciate your kind message of  
sympathy in the sad loss of their son  
and brother, George.

Tingoorra Road, Wondai     15th February, 1941.

**GEORGE DAVID BURNS**

AGED 24 YEARS

KILLED IN ACTION  
AT  
BARDIA

3rd January,  
1941.

—  
FOR KING AND COUNTRY





“He Like a Soldier Fell”

—:O:—  
TRIBUTE TO LATE TROOPER  
GEORGE BURNS

FROM MAJOR MACARTHUR-ONSLOW

“George fell at Bardia, as the result of a direct hit from a shell which killed him instantly, and we buried him the following day upon the escarpment overlooking Bardia,” wrote Major MacArthur-Onslow, Officer in Charge of a Reconnaissance Regiment of the A.I.F. from “Somewhere Abroad,” to Mr. and Mrs. R.L. Burns of Wondai, re the death in action of their son Trooper George Burns, whose passing was previously advised in these columns.

The letter continued: —  
“George proved himself to be a grand soldier and a good comrade, and you may be sure we are one and all proud of him and his comrades who have given their all for Australia. They have added lustre to the record of our troops, and will for all time be an inspiration to those who are carrying on the work they commenced.”  
Major MacArthur-Onslow added his expressions of personal sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Burns and enclosed “a few lines that have been penned by one of his comrades, which will give you a true indication of the esteem in which George (known among his comrades as ‘Dave’) was held by all members of the Squadron.”

The lines are: —  
**HE SLEEPS AT BARDIA**  
A lonely cross with a starlit sky,  
A windswept hill and a wistful cry,  
Hushed, drowsy wavelets kissing the shore,  
A brave heart stilled for evermore.  
  
Gladly you fought with us, gladly you died,  
Your cobbles around you, your eyes full of pride,  
With the enemy routed and victory in sight,  
Whilst the thunder of battle shattered the night.  
  
We shall always remember you; think of us, “Dave”  
Of the fun that we shared and the hardships too;  
A man every inch of you, a man at his best:  
Sleep well old fellow, God guard you in rest.

*South Burnett Times: 01 May 1941*



**Above:** George was originally buried on the battlefield (see SBT above, and map on p102), but at some point his remains were transferred to the Knightsbridge War Cemetery. His grave at the cemetery, grid reference 15F2, was first marked with the cross pictured above, before being replaced with a headstone similar to those in the background photo.

The Knightsbridge cemetery is located about 15 miles west of Tobruk, 700 yards south of the main road to Benghazi, and is set in open country with a Cross of Sacrifice set high above the surrounding graves.



A blood-laced hill, a dawning sky,  
Fingers trace a mournful score,  
A bugle wails its solemn cry,  
A heart now feels a pulse no more<sup>1</sup>.

Cobbers beside you, fear cast asunder,  
Bardia crumbles, surrenders and cowers,  
Gladly you sallied for King and Down Under,  
George you'll not taste it, but victory is ours.

Soldiers a'wondering, salute a fresh grave,  
Entombed for your journey, the hour's gone tide's neap,  
Forever in Libya – vale George (Trooper “Dave”)  
The Boatman awaits, charged with your keep.  
Rest easy Great Uncle... rest ever and sleep.

1. Borrowed from a poem I remembered learning in secondary school:  
Thomas Moore's *The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls*:

“And hearts that once beat high for praise,  
Now feel that pulse no more.”

After reading and transcribing the *South Burnett Times*' article,  
opposite, in the Julia Creek Library, 27/8/2003, I wrote a variation of  
the poem *He Sleeps at Bardia* as a tribute to my Great Uncle.

*I have left Palestine*



IMMEDIATELY after Bardia was taken on 5 January 1941, a British armoured division moved west along the Mediterranean coast and surrounded the Italian fortress at Tobruk. On 7 January the Australian 6th Division arrived and took up positions in a semi-circle about 9 miles from the town, facing the enemy's defences. The defences at Tobruk were a replica of the defences at Bardia: manned posts dug into the desert floor, protected by an antitank ditch and barbed wire. For the next fortnight the Australians sent out nightly patrols to explore the Italian positions, look for mines and booby traps, and gain familiarity with the ground.

The assault on Tobruk by the Australians began predawn on the morning of 21 January and by nightfall they had control of the eastern half of the town. The remainder of the enemy troops had little interest in continuing to resist. On the afternoon of the 22 January the last of the Italians surrendered having lost 25,000 killed, wounded and captured. Australian casualties numbered 49 dead and 306 wounded.

The Allies continued their drive to the west, taking Derna on 30 January and Benghazi on 7 February. The advance came to a halt when Churchill decided that the majority of the troops in Libya would be sent to help Greece repel a looming German invasion. And so it was that two weeks after the fall of Benghazi the Allied forces in the desert had been significantly reduced.

On 24 February it was decided to protect the newly captured territory in Libya with the 9th Australian Division – raw, untested and ill-equipped – and part of a British armoured division, thus freeing the 6th Australian Division (and other troops) for operations in Greece. In response to this decision, Ned's battalion, the 2/15th, left its camp at Kilo 89 just before midnight on 27 February and began its move to the front line.

# Ned to the Front Line

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Sunday, 2 March 1941*

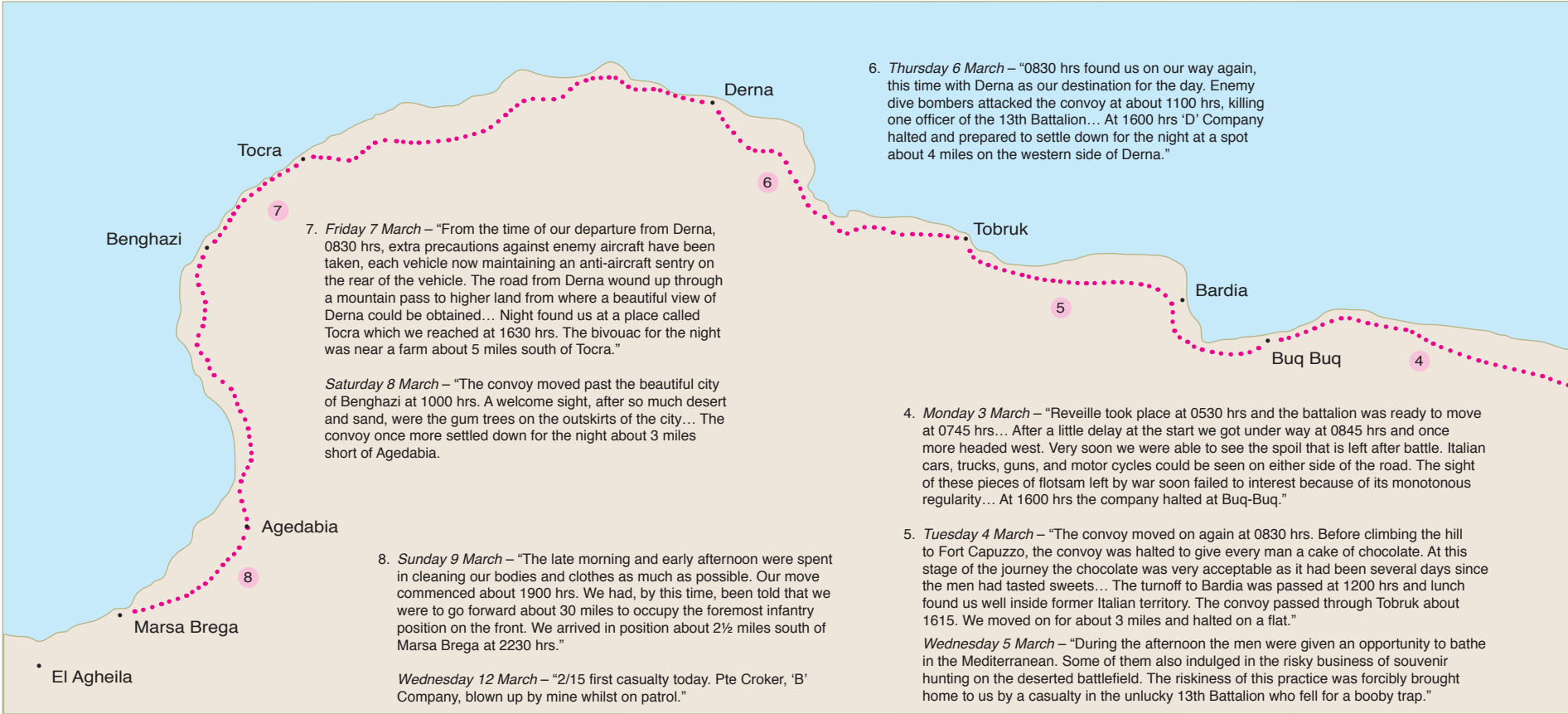
TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – This is just a short note, Darling, to tell you that I have left Palestine, and also not to expect many letters from me in future as the mail service isn't what it was. Please tell them at home I'll write to them the next chance I have.

Well, Darling, how are you getting on at your new job? Still okay, I hope. There are a lot of things I would like to tell you about, but at present I can't, so you will have to wait till I can, or maybe till I get back, eh, Sweet.

Well, Dawn, I'm afraid I'll have to close. This note is really just to let you and those at home know I'm still okay and enjoying the best of health (if not tucker) and hoping to see you again before the year is out.

Darling, I have a few snaps here that I will send to you at the first chance I get. Also the one you wanted. Give my love to all at home, Sweet, and tell them I'll write soon. Cheerio, Sweet Heart.

*From your ever-loving soldier  
NED*





QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Tuesday, 11 March 1941

TO MY DEAREST DAWN – Well, Precious, I am back again at the writing desk, that is if you can call your knees a desk. Darling, don't altogether blame me for not writing more often, but there isn't always the time, place or materials to write with. At present I'm sitting in a hole dug in the ground and there's sand blowing over everything.

I think I told you that I had left Palestine about two weeks ago and I've certainly covered some country in that time, mostly desert, though in some places the view was rather pretty. Just now, Darling, I'm camped out in the desert. Dug in as a matter of fact, and I'm hoping that I stay here for a while, too, as I want to catch up on my correspondence and to let some of it catch up to me, if possible.

Well, Dearest, I haven't much to say except I've passed through a couple of places where the boys have been in action. There was quite a mess left behind, too.

Darling, have you heard from your people lately? How are they getting on? Okay I hope. I suppose you are okay as well. How is that nice boy getting on? Have you met him since? Tell me what he is like. Do you still go to Mum's on Sundays, Dearest, or have you had a row yet? Tell me about everything when you write, Sweet, as your two letters are the only ones I've had since I left home. And let me tell you, it's not so good not getting any mail. It's all I live for.

Darling, I'll have to close as I'm getting slightly cramped in the position I'm in. Cheerio till the next time, Sweet Heart. All the best of luck.

*From your everloving Soldier Boy.*  
*Wed.*

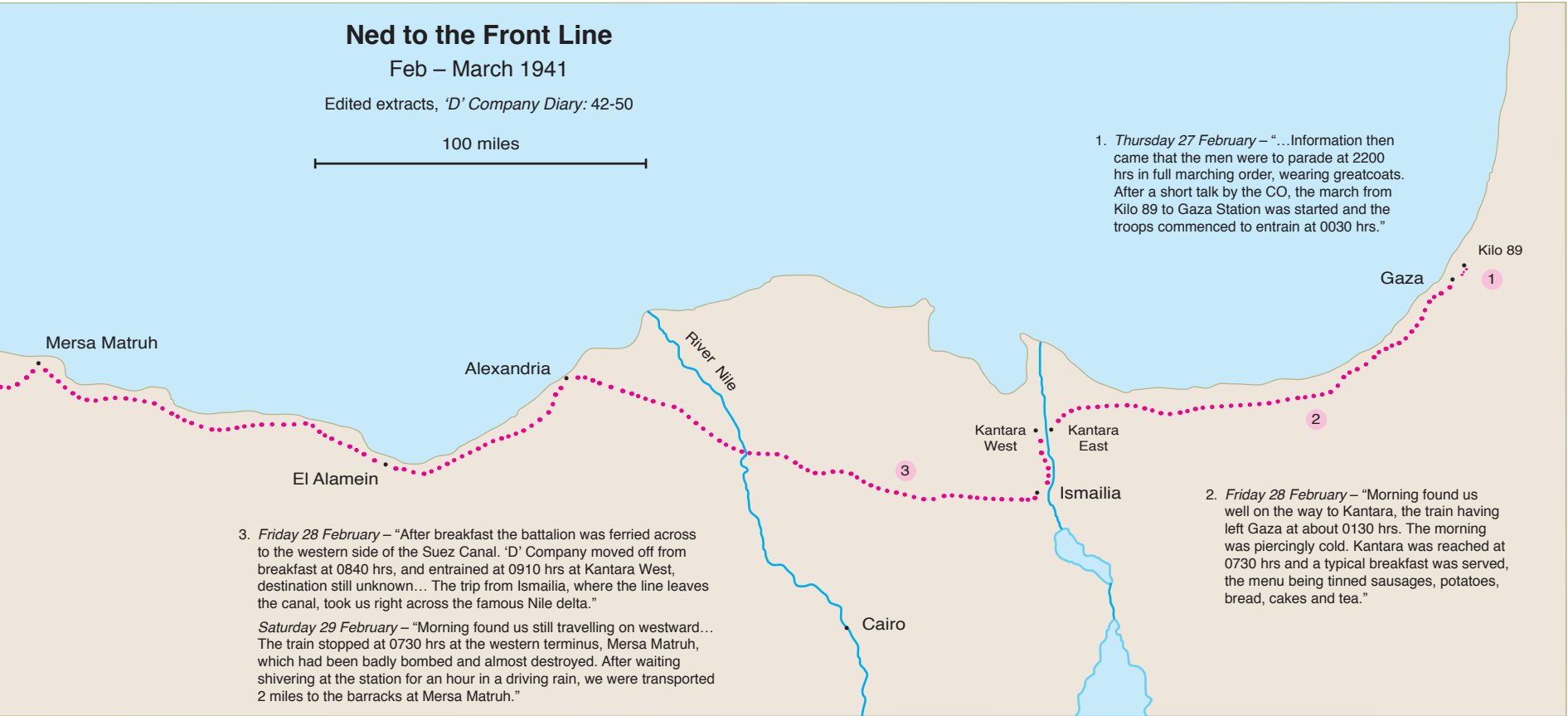
Quite a mess left behind

Edited extracts, *Official History*: vol 1, 138, 272

THE battle was over. Although the enemy division on the inland flank had been allowed to escape, the victory at Sidi Barrani had been decisive and spectacular. Along the 50-miles-wide battlefield, and astride the road leading west, lay a fantastic litter of abandoned trucks, guns and tanks, piles of abandoned arms and ammunition, of food stores and clothing, and of the paper which a modern army spends so profusely. It was some days before all the enemy dead had been found and buried. Long columns of dejected Italian prisoners in drab olive-green and khaki streamed eastwards. In the whole battle 38,300 prisoners, 237 field guns, 73 tanks and four generals were captured.

AFTER the fighting had ended at Benghazi the desert looked like a film producer's conception of a battlefield. For 10 miles the stony floor was littered with hundreds of Lancia and Fiat trucks, many overturned and splintered by shell fire. Dozens of dark-green tanks had Italian crews dead inside them. There were lines of abandoned field guns with ammunition boxes scattered round. Rifles, machine-guns, grenades, and boxes and tins lay where they had fallen; and everywhere on the ground or caught in the low dry bushes were pieces of paper – letters, cards, notepaper and army forms.

Operation Compass was over. In two months, for a cost of 475 killed, 1,225 wounded and 43 missing or prisoners, the Allies had advanced 500 miles and taken 130,000 prisoners, 400 tanks and 1,290 field guns. It had destroyed 10 Italian infantry divisions and considerable armoured equipment.



*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Friday, 21 March 1941*

TO MY MOST PRECIOUS DARLING – Thank you very much for your ever-welcome letter, Dawn. I received it yesterday and I nearly stood on my head with joy at getting one from you at last. It was such a long time since I had heard from you I really thought you had dumped me and found someone else to love.

Darling, there is one thing I want you to do for me and that is to write more often and not wait till you get my letters before writing to me. My letters are only written when the opportunity arises, and that's not often, and then they may not be sent for quite a while after being written. Also, Darling, they are likely to be held up anywhere on the way back and sometimes you may get two or three letters at a time. So, Precious, think of me more often and do something about it please, won't you Dear? The only thing I live for over here is to receive your letters<sup>1</sup> and know you still love me a little.

Well, Precious, I'm still in the same hole I described in my last letter. Hole is the right word for it, too. It's about 2½' deep, 7' long and 2½' wide, with three sheets of iron on top at ground level, and an opening at one end just big enough to step into. It's a luxury home built all by myself, and it looks like I'll be stopping here quite a while longer, too, Darling.

I don't know what you or anyone else back there would do if you saw me now. Haven't shaved for over a week and haven't had a wash for four days (last bath was in Palestine), and I'm dressed in dirty shorts and shirt – and boots of course. In the mornings when it's cold, and sometimes all day when there's a wind blowing (and the wind blows its hardest nearly all the time), an overcoat goes over it all.

Just at present there are two kinds of storms trying to get underway: a sandstorm and a rainstorm. As there is a heavy wind blowing, I'm backing the sandstorm to win.

Oh, by the way, Sweet, I forgot one important thing about my dugout. It's got a bag hooked up over the opening to act as a trap door to keep the sand out...

Excuse the break, but there was a bit of excitement above me and I had to have a look. I'm sorry I can't tell you about it, but you said in one of your letters that there were a lot over Ascot<sup>2</sup> and you supposed there were a lot over here that I saw. Well, you were correct, but it's only at odd times I get any excitement out of them. Do you catch on? I suppose, Love, you think I've gone nuts, eh. Well, maybe I have, but skip it if you don't understand.

22.3.1941 – Well, Dearest, I'm back again. Someone rather rudely interrupted me yesterday and this is the first chance I've had to resume writing. I've been scrounging wood all morning and it wasn't the most pleasant of jobs either, because there is a sandstorm on (I won my bet) and

you would think it was raining heavily by the way the sand is hitting on the roof of my dugout, or "The Home de Luxe" as I've called it.

Precious, I'm about three times dirtier today than I was yesterday, so excuse the scribble. I'm not game to touch the paper because you might not be able to read it for dirt.

Precious, it's rather hard to concentrate here. Everything seems against me and nothing happens that I can tell you about, except to tell you what I eat, which isn't much. Bully beef and biscuits and sand. Sand mostly. Even if I do get a change from the other, sand is still the main part of the menu. I think I have put on about 20 lbs since I first arrived in this blasted desert, but it's not in flesh, it's the sand I've eaten.

Sweet Heart, you will never realise how much I've regretted joining up since I've been over here. Just to think of you back home puts me in the dumps. I feel like walking out on the AIF if it could only be done, but once over here, worse luck, here you stay till you either cop something or the war ends.

Darling, I hope you don't go falling in love with any of those boys you seem to know. I'm still a jealous blighter, you know. It nearly drives me nuts thinking of you loose amongst all the boys back there.

Sweet, I hope you are looking after yourself<sup>3</sup>. I know you can if you want to. It's just that I'm thinking, Darling, that during Pre Em<sup>4</sup> we shared something – something we can't share now I'm over here, and that maybe you don't want to look after yourself now. I hope you don't mind mention of it. And don't get too wild because you think I doubt you, but I'm worried, Sweet. It's only natural you should want to. Please, Precious, keep true to me won't you, till I go out<sup>5</sup>, or else till you are sure you have fallen in love with someone else.

Sometimes Dearest (I don't know whether the climate has got me or not)... but sometimes I think we have said our last goodbye. Maybe you will change your mind, or else I won't be coming back. It seems more like the latter to me. Maybe it's my yellow streak coming out at last and I'm getting scared, eh. Do you think so?

Darling, I'm closing this letter till I get some more paper. Tell them all at home the news in this letter and explain why I didn't answer Mum's letter the same time as yours. I got both letters last Thursday and now I'm out of paper and stamps and it will be a week before I get any more.

24.3.1941 – I've carried this letter in my pocket for quite a while, so excuse the delay but I moved<sup>6</sup>. Cheerio, Sweet Heart. All my love to you, Dawn Dearest.

*From your Soldier's Lover  
Ned x x x*

1. Ned mentions several times in his letters that mail from home was considered most important. Irregularity of air mail and the infrequency of sea mail caused genuine hardship, especially to the men of the 6th Division (such as George Burns) who arrived in the Middle East in 1940, the year before Ned. There was no sea mail from Australia for two months after Italy's entry into the war (June 1940), and sometimes no air mail for several weeks.

Postage for a letter home was 1s 6d – a significant cost for an unmarried Private receiving 5s a day (and an additional 2s a day

deferred pay) who was wanting to send several letters a week to family and friends. In November 1940 the situation improved when a regular twice-weekly service was established and the letter rate was reduced to 9d (see Ned's envelope on p118).

2. At the time Ned wrote this letter, Dawn was living in the Brisbane suburb of Ascot (see envelope on p118) about 5 kilometres from the airport. To avoid the censor's scissors, Ned had to allude to the enemy aircraft above him by referring to a letter of Dawn's in which she said there were "a lot over Ascot" (meaning planes).

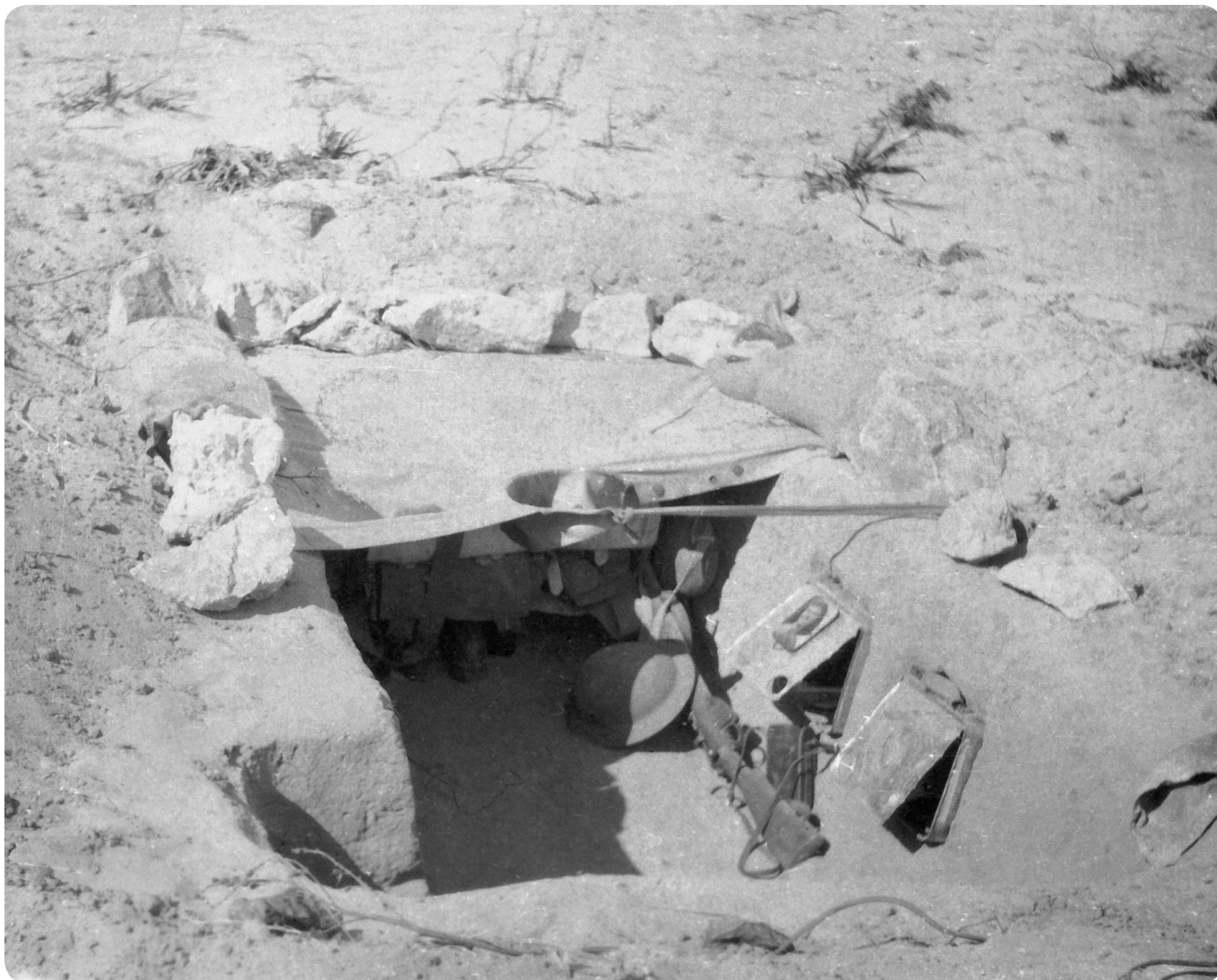
3. "...looking after yourself": Refrain from sex?

4. Pre Em: pre embarkation leave before leaving for overseas. Ned seems to be suggesting that during Pre Em (7-8 December 1940, see p70), he and Dawn had some kind of sexual experience.

5. "go out": get killed.

6. After finishing the previous section of this letter during the morning of 22 March, in the afternoon Ned's battalion moved away from the front line to Ghemines (see map on p116), and from there to Er Regima, east of Benghazi.





**Above:** One of Ned's dugouts. It is not his "Home de Luxe" mentioned in the letter opposite, as it lacks the sheet-iron roof and appears to be wider, about 4' versus the 2½' mentioned in the letter.

Set in the side wall are two square tins, containers acting as cupboards (the

hinged lids of the tins are the cupboard doors), which give the dugout a long-term, lived-in look. More than likely this dugout is one of several that Ned used at Tobruk. The entrance is via the step on the left cut into the desert floor.

Of particular interest is the photo of

Dawn on the lid of the cupboard near the tin hat. The photo (see p39) survived two years with Ned in the Middle East and he was able to bring it home to Australia intact.

[Ned, NF54, 1941]





ERWIN ROMMEL (1891-1944), the "Desert Fox", was the most famous of Hitler's Field Marshals. He was commander of the Afrika Korps and is regarded as the most skillful exponent of desert warfare in World War 2. He later took charge of the German forces opposing the Allied invasion at Normandy.

Rommel's military successes earned the respect not only of his own troops (and Adolf Hitler), but also that of his enemy. His enduring legacy is that of an honourable and compassionate military officer, in contrast with many other figures of Nazi Germany. His humanity shines through when he describes a situation confronting him before he captured Tobruk in June 1942 (*Rommel Papers*, p213):

*At about this time there fell into our hands an order issued by the 4th British Armoured Brigade to the effect that German and Italian prisoners were to be given nothing to eat or drink until they had been interrogated. We found this very disturbing, for measures of this kind could only result in the war between the British and Germans, already tragic enough, being intensified to a deplorable bitterness. Evidently the British command were of the same opinion, for they withdrew the order at our intervention.*

Rommel's Afrika Korps was not accused of any war crimes: captured soldiers during his Africa campaign reported being treated humanely, and orders to kill captured Jewish soldiers and Jewish civilians were ignored.

Following the defeat of Axis forces in North Africa, and while commanding the defence of occupied France, his fortunes changed when he was suspected of involvement in the failed plot of 20 July 1944 to kill Hitler. He was forced to choose between execution (and the likelihood of recriminations against his family), or taking his own life and being buried with full military honours. On 14 October, Rommel chose the latter. He swallowed a vial of poison while sitting in the front seat of a car not far from his home.



# It's Just a Game of Tig

*You chase me then I chase you, kind of<sup>1</sup>*

Edited extracts, *Official History*: vol 1, 277-280; vol 3, 30-63

AFTER the Allies captured Bardia on 4 January 1941, Hitler and his staff were anxious lest the entire Italian presence in Libya should collapse. On 11 January, Hitler directed that German units be sent to Libya to help the Italians check the British advance. It was decided that the German force would be a light motorised division including a reconnaissance unit (equipped mainly with armoured cars), three antitank groups (around 30 antitank guns each), 30 tanks, and two motorised machine-gun battalions.

With the Allies continuing their push west to Benghazi, and the possibility that they might attempt to take Tripoli and drive the Italians out of Africa altogether, on 3 February Hitler ordered that preparations were to be made to reinforce the light motorised division with a full armoured division. General Rommel, who had distinguished himself in France in 1940, was appointed to lead all the German forces in Africa.

*12 Feb:* Rommel arrives in Tripoli to take command of the Afrika Korps.

*18 Mar:* Rommel leaves Africa to report to the German High Command. Before leaving, he orders plans be made for an operation to seize El Agheila on 24 March (see map over page).

*19 Mar:* At Hitler's headquarters, Rommel tells Hitler that the British are concentrating their forces near Benghazi and appear to be thinking defensively. He asks for reinforcements to assist in an offensive. Hitler replies that the 15th Armoured Division, due to be dispatched in May, is the only reinforcement Rommel can expect.

*21 Mar:* A British platoon is sent out to guard El Agheila.

*23 Mar:* First skirmish with Germans near El Agheila. Rommel returns to Libya and orders the attack on El Agheila to proceed.

*24 Mar:* El Agheila taken by the Germans. When Churchill learns of the capture, he expresses to General Wavell (overall commander in the Middle East) his concern at the rapid German advance:

*It is their habit to push on whenever they are not resisted. I presume you are only waiting for the tortoise to stick his head out far enough before chopping it off. It seems extremely important to give them an early taste of our quality.*

But giving the Germans a taste of British quality would be difficult. In his reply to Churchill, Wavell admits that his forces in Libya are weak – having sent a considerable proportion of them to Greece – and that no additional armoured troops, his chief need, are available.

*26 Mar:* General Wavell instructs his commanders that the safeguarding of troops is of much greater importance than the retention of ground:

*The re-occupation of Benghazi by the enemy, though it would have considerable propaganda and prestige value, would be of little military importance, and it is certainly not worthwhile risking defeat to retain it.*

He also orders preparations for the creation of a "military desert" at Benghazi, Agedabia, Msus and in the surrounding country. All military stores, wells and installations are to be prepared for demolition.

*26-28 Mar:* Dust storms reduce visibility. No German offensive movement.

*31 Mar:* Germans approach Marsa Brega. Rommel described the situation:

*It was with some misgivings that we watched the British activities, because if they had once been allowed time to build-up, and wire and mine their positions, they would then have proved difficult either to assault or to outflank from the south. I was therefore faced with the choice of either waiting for the rest of my troops to arrive at the end of May – which would have given the British time to construct such strong defences that it would have been very difficult for our attack to achieve the desired result – or of going ahead with our existing small forces to attack and take the Marsa Brega position in its present undeveloped state. I decided for the latter.*

At 7 p.m. German armoured cars and tanks enter Marsa Brega. As darkness falls the British withdraw about 8 miles. The way to Benghazi – and to Tobruk – has been prised open.

*1 Apr:* An Allied withdrawal from Benghazi is now being considered; demolitions are prepared and troops are to be ready to evacuate at 24 hours' notice. A message is dispatched to London. The mere mention of withdrawal is enough to anger Churchill:

*It would be all right to give up ground for the purposes of manoeuvre, but any serious withdrawal from Benghazi would appear most melancholy. I cannot understand how the enemy can have developed any considerable force at the end of this long, waterless coast-road; and I cannot feel that there is, at this moment, a persistent weight behind this attack. If this blob which has come forward against you could be cut off, you might have a prolonged easement. Of course, if they succeed in wandering onwards they will gradually destroy the effect of your victories.*

*2 Apr:* German forces undertake a limited reconnaissance towards Agedabia. When, in the morning, the British forces withdraw from Agedabia after first contact, Rommel takes the bit in his teeth and orders a general advance:

*It was a chance I could not resist, and I gave orders for Agedabia to be attacked and taken, in spite of the fact that my instructions were not to undertake any such operation before the end of May.*

*3 Apr:* At 7.30 a.m. Benghazi is ordered to be evacuated and the demolition process begins. There is to be a withdrawal to a line running from Derna to Mechili, yielding almost the entire hump of Libya to the Germans.

In the early afternoon Rommel orders a small party to reconnoitre the Trigh el Abd track as far as Ben Gania, and also to reconnoitre the track to Msus. When he learns that Benghazi has been evacuated, he orders his forces to press on to the city during the night. They enter the town about an hour before dawn. During the evening Rommel writes to his wife<sup>2</sup>:

*The "brass" at Tripoli, Rome and possibly Berlin will gasp. I took the risk against all orders because I saw an opportunity. No doubt it will all be pronounced good later, and I am sure that anybody in my position would have done the same thing. The first objective set down for the end of May has been reached. The British are in flight.*

Ned's game of tig had now entered its "then I chase you" phase. Rommel chased the Australians all the way back to Tobruk in what became known, jocularly, as the Benghazi Handicap.

1. Quote is from Ned's letter of 4/4/1941, on p118.

2. A different translation is given on p111 of *The Rommel Papers*.

## The Desert Fox pursues his quarry across the hump of Libya



ON 4 APRIL the situation in Libya became critical. Churchill was informed that the 9th Australian Division, which was about to embark for Greece, would have to remain and move to the western desert. In a telegraphed message he stated:

*Far more important than the loss of ground is the idea that we cannot face the Germans, and that their appearance is enough to drive us back many scores of miles. Sooner or later we shall have to fight the Huns. By all means make the best plan of manoeuvre, but anyhow – fight!*

5 Apr: Germans close in on Msus. All Commonwealth forces in the Benghazi region are in imminent peril of encirclement by the Germans, and are ordered to withdraw immediately to the line of Derna - Mechili.

Near dusk, a German forward party reaches Tengeder, with units strung behind at wide intervals.

6 Apr: At dawn, a large German force moves east from Msus. At the same time, Rommel is 12 miles from Mechili at the head of a German column advancing from Tengeder, and receives a first-hand report of a substantial British force ahead. His reaction was characteristic: "There was now no time to lose otherwise the bird would be flown".

The appearance of Rommel's forces near Mechili causes the British to abandon the entire hump of Libya. Orders are issued for the Australian 9th Division to withdraw immediately to the Gazala area.

7 Apr: In the morning, Rommel and his forces approach Mechili:

*Soon we came in sight of Fort Mechili. Large numbers of enemy vehicles were parked there, and through glasses we were easily able to pick out the men standing about in groups. At first, the enemy showed no signs of putting up a defence, and as our attack was due to be launched on the following morning I sent an emissary across under a flag of truce with a summons to the British commander to surrender. Of course he refused.*

8 April: At about 0600 hrs Rommel flies off in his Storch<sup>‡</sup> to the east of Mechili in order to follow the course of action:

*Flying at about 150 feet we approached one of our battalions. Apparently the Italians had never seen a Storch before and were so completely*

*bewildered by our sudden appearance over their heads that they fired on us from all directions. At a range of 50 to 100 yards it was a miracle we were not shot down, and it did not speak well for Italian marksmanship.*

*We swung round and soon put a fold of ground between our allies and ourselves. Having no wish to be shot down by my own Italians I had the aircraft climb to 3000 feet from where we observed the situation in safety.*

At first light, the British attempt a break-out of Mechili. Fighting ceases at about 8 a.m. with approximately 3000 prisoners taken, including 102 Australians. Rommel's ousting from Libya of his opponents is nearly complete. He continues chasing them to Tobruk:

*However, it still seemed to me very important to remain on the enemy's heels, and, by keeping the pressure up, persuade him to continue his retreat.*

In summing up his first success in desert warfare, Rommel later wrote:

*The British had been completely deceived as to our real strength. Their moves would have been very astute if they had, in fact, really been attacked by a force as strong as they had supposed. Thus they did not engage our forces at Agedabia, but pulled back in order to concentrate and conserve their strength.*

*Our capture of Mechili was a coup; the enemy had probably not reckoned on our using the route through Tengeder and appearing as early as we did in front of Mechili. They were taken completely by surprise and were probably again deceived as to our true strength by the dust clouds which were deliberately stirred up by our troops. Similarly, they had not reckoned on our making such a rapid advance to Derna. Hence it was principally our speed that we had to thank for this victory.*

4. Thursday 3 April – "Orders to move, enemy active around Benghazi. News reached company that 2/13th had lost some 150 men in brush with enemy at Regima." Friday, 4 April – "Company left at 0300 hrs, marched 2 miles to road, then picked up by transport. Passed through Barce at 0830 hrs and took up defensive position on top of escarpment facing Barce."
3. Thursday 27 March – "Company left Regima at 1115 hrs and marched east to site south of El Abiar, arriving at 1830 hrs. Very hilly country. Green grass in wadis." Ned's company took up a defensive position beside the road and spent the next week patrolling and improving the defences.
2. Sunday 23 March – "Battalion rested all day. Nazi planes bombed all around area, setting fire to petrol dump." Monday 24 March – "Left at 0100 hrs passing through Benghazi and on to Regima, arriving at 0800 hrs." The 2/15th stayed at Er Regima until Thursday.

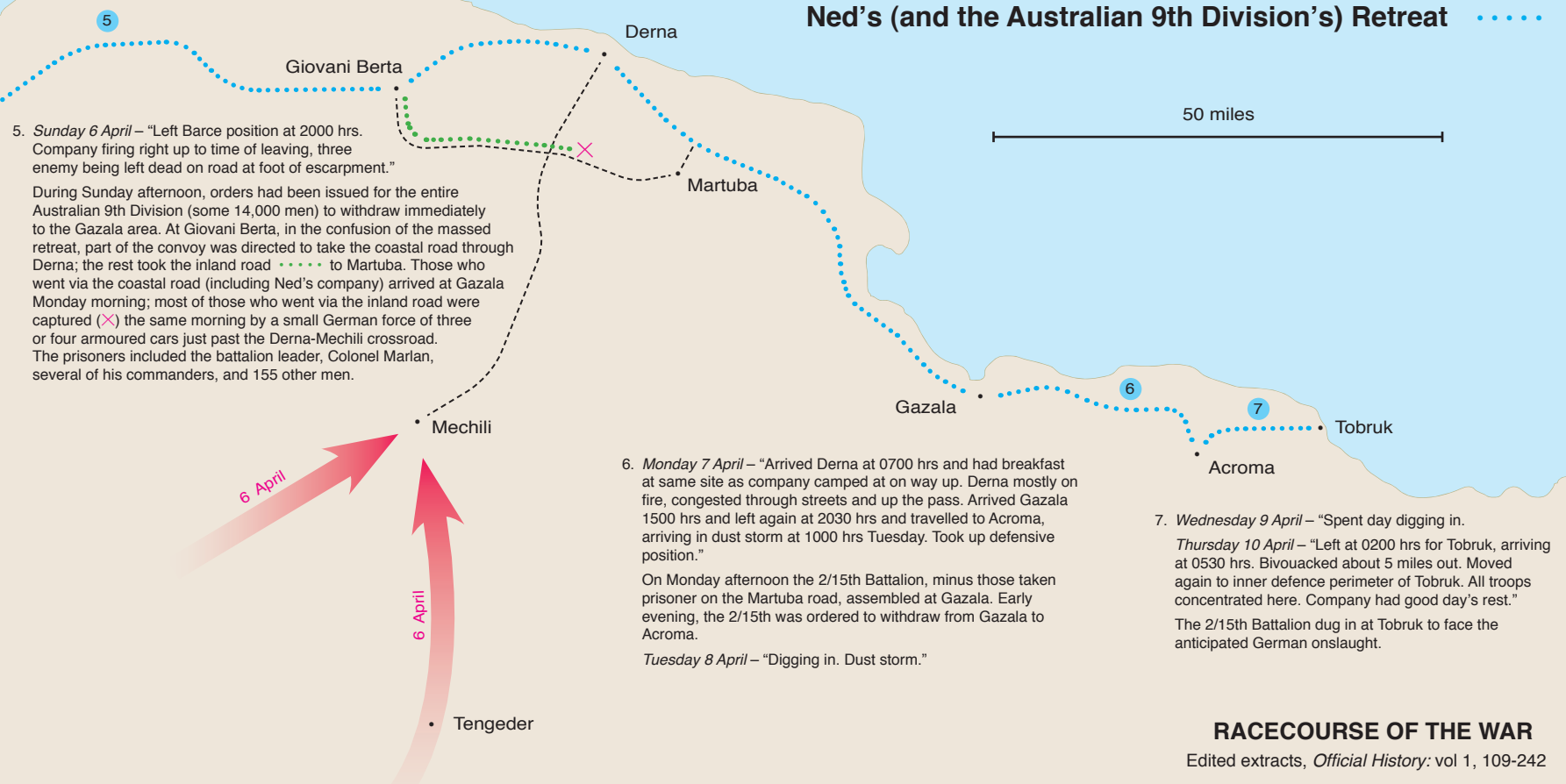
Extracts from 'D' Company Diary

1. Saturday 22 March – "Quiet day. Company moved out at 2130 hrs in lorries. Travelled all night, extremely unpleasant. Arrived near Magrum [Ghemines] at 0800 hrs Sunday."

‡ The Storch (stork) was a small German aircraft built before and during World War 2. The wings could be folded back along the fuselage, allowing it to be carried on a trailer. In flight, the long legs of the landing gear, which contained shock absorbers that compressed about 18 inches, hung beneath the aircraft giving it the appearance of a long-legged, big-winged bird, hence its nickname, *Storch*. With its very low landing speed of little more than 30 mph, and short landing distance of 60 feet, the Storch could set down almost anywhere.



## Ned's (and the Australian 9th Division's) Retreat



### RACECOURSE OF THE WAR

Edited extracts, *Official History*: vol 1, 109-242

THE BATTLE for control of Libya has been described as “the racecourse of the war”. The opposing armies could only advance a certain distance from their home base (Tripoli for the Germans; Alexandria for the British), beyond which their supply lines broke down:

*Each army in turn galloped forward until its momentum was exhausted, and then was compelled to gallop back to avoid annihilation<sup>1</sup>.*

When the British and Australian troops galloped inside fortress Tobruk, driven from the field and entrapped by Rommel, only nine days had elapsed since the attack had begun. Rommel wrote that “it was principally our speed that we had to thank for this victory”. It was his vigour, his urgent passion to clutch the dangled trophies of war, that more than anything had forced the British collapse.

Although Rommel intervened sooner and in greater strength, and was opposed less effectively than had been expected; although defeat was suffered and territory yielded – yet the German advance was soon stopped and Tobruk was held.

During the final days of the retreat, Churchill exhorted his commander-in-chief in the Middle East, General Wavell, to fight back:

*You should surely be able to hold Tobruk, with its permanent Italian defences, at least until the enemy brings up strong artillery. It seems difficult to believe he can do this for some weeks...Tobruk therefore seems to be a place to be held to the death without thought of retirement.*

At the end of April 1941 Rommel had at his command a force with no match in Africa. It must have galled him that the Suez Canal was only just beyond his reach. His tanks could not strike into the heart of Egypt so long as Tobruk held out; his supply line would be too long. Even if the supply problem could be solved, he did not have the infantry necessary to consolidate his hold on any territory gained by thrusting east. And if his infantry were released from laying siege at Tobruk, the British and Australians could sally forth and cut his supply route. Rommel, therefore, chose the logical course – to subdue Tobruk.

The Australian 9th Division was commanded by Major General Leslie Morshead. He made clear to his brigadiers the spirit in which he would conduct the defence:

*There'll be no Dunkirk here. If we should have to get out, we shall fight our way out. There is to be no surrender and no retreat.*

The strength of the combat troops under Morshead was approximately 24,000, of whom 14,270 were Australian and approximately 9000 British.

Morshead's defence policy was based on four principles: that no ground should be yielded; that the Australians should dominate no-man's-land; that no effort should be spared in improving defence works and constructing new obstacles; and that the defence should be organised in the greatest depth possible.

Morshead's attitude was reflected in his instruction to one of his commanders, that he was to move his headquarters farther forward. The commander in turn

sent out a memorandum to his officers on the conduct of the defence. The opening paragraph gave the overall theme:

*The responsibility will immediately fall upon each front-line unit to not only maintain the line and territory which it takes over, but also to put in hand at once a policy of aggression against the enemy: to exert and maintain a superiority of morale over him; to systematically wipe out his forward posts and to occupy the same ground with our own troops; and thus incessantly to exert pressure upon the enemy and relentlessly drive him back. It is to be made perfectly clear to all ranks that we are not simply there to hold a line. We are there with the definite purpose and intention of regaining ground previously lost, and of inflicting loss on the enemy by every means in our power.*

The mastery of no-man's-land was unrelentingly maintained throughout the siege by patrolling beyond the front line and by aggressive employment of the artillery. Morshead insisted that no-man's-land should be patrolled in breadth and depth each night without exception. Defence was never to be inactive.

The siege lasted 242 days from 11 April until 7 December 1941 when Rommel relinquished his efforts to keep Tobruk bottled up and pulled his forces west, away from the Egyptian frontier. The bulk of the Australians withdrew during September and October after handing over to a British Division, but Ned's 'D' Company remained until November.

1. Quoted in *Let Enemies Beware*: p35.

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Friday, 4 April 1941*

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – I received your ever-welcome letters yesterday, one boat and one airmail, and was very pleased to hear from you again, Darling. It's been quite a while since I've written, but I always seem to be on the move and I haven't any chance of writing then.

Dearest, the only news I can write about is the country and the Arabs, and both are rotten. First, the country is either desert or rocky hills with no trees and very little grass, and everywhere I've been there are Arabs with their camels, donkeys, sheep and dogs. God only knows how they all live in this country. I haven't the faintest idea, nor do I want to know. Anyway, Precious, I think I have told you all this before so I will change the subject.

I'm in the best of health, Love, even if I'm not the cleanest being alive, and I'm enjoying everything to the best of my ability. Just at present I'm waiting and hoping for things to break my way. It's rather tiring waiting all the time, so here's hoping that I get a bit of action for a change.

*10.4.1941* – Quite a gap in this letter, eh, Dawn, but it can't be helped. Conditions have changed a lot in the last week and if you could only see me now you would weep. I'm back in the desert again, Sweet, and if I was dirty before I don't know what I am now. The desert welcomed me back with a nice little dust storm.

Well, Sweet, things don't look the best at present. It's just a game of tig over here: you chase me then I chase you, kind of.

Darling, I'm closing now till later as there is a scare on. Maybe something will come of it. I hope so anyway. There's also another dust storm blowing up, worse luck. Cheerio, Sweet Heart, till the next time I write.

*From your loving soldier Sweet Heart  
NED*



Above: Letter 10 from overseas, received by Dawn 6 May.

*11.4.1941* – Well, Precious, here I am back again and doing quite well, too, after all the sleep I've lost in the last week. I caught up a bit this morning: four hours solid sleep without a break. I only want a bath now and I would feel a new man.

I received another letter last night, Dear. That brings the total letters yesterday up to six: three from you and three from Mum. Mum's letters were written just after I left and sent by boat mail. Tell her that there is no need to worry about me spending all my money on stamps, because for one thing they are so damn hard to get, and another is that they are the only thing I can spend my money on.

Sweet Heart, nothing of great interest has happened yet. I suppose you know the news better than I do myself. There's no need to worry as things are all okay with me at present. I've not heard any news (BBC news) for quite a while. I only get the rumours and they are simply astounding at times.

Darling, you would like to do something for me – or so you say, Sweet. Well, it's not much. I want only for you to wait for me and keep true to me, Sweet Heart. That's all I want. And of course to keep writing, but otherwise it's not much use to send me anything because it's only really a waste of money. It takes nearly three months to get here by boat and God knows where I'll be then. If you like, though, you can knit me something.

Oh Darling, please send me some snaps of you with your next letter. I would like to have one or two. Also, remember those snaps I was to send to you? Well, I'll send them, but not at present as I'm not sure if these letters will get over to you. Anyway, I'll see what can be done about them.

Darling, you seem to be having a good time over there, eh. I began to feel very jealous when you started talking about the sailors in Brisbane. I only wish I was back there, Dearest, with you.

So, Darling, you have met Marj. Did she bring the kids down with her? I suppose not. I'm darn sorry I missed seeing her before I left. Matter of fact, I'm more than sorry I left at all.

Well, Dearest, I'll have to close now as it's dinner time. Dinner time my eye! It's 3 o'clock and I haven't had it yet, so I'll finish this and be off.

You will have to excuse the writing, the paper, the dirt, and the way this letter is written. I thought I had got over my paper difficulty, but in the rush I left it behind and now I'm writing on an old note book I picked up.

Sweet Heart, give my love to Mum and Dad and everyone else over there who knows me. Also to your father and mother and Jean. Give Marj my love, too, if she is still down, but I suppose she has gone back a fair while now. Darling, here's wishing you the best of luck and pleasant dreams.

*From yours forever truly  
NED*

P.S. You were wanting to know what I meant by saying I would be back by Xmas. Well, I meant just what I said. I don't say how, but that's what I hope to do and where I hope to be. I think the war will be over by then.

*Lots of love  
NED*



## I'm in Tobruk

QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Friday, 25 April 1941

TO MY DEAREST DAWN – Well, Darling, here I am again. I'm sorry I haven't written before this, but the mail service has been closed. No outward or inward mail at all. It wouldn't have been much use if I had written, would it? Anyway, it's open once again so I can resume writing.

Yesterday I received four letters: one each from you and Marj, and two from Mum, the first letters I've received for quite some time.

I suppose, Darling, you have guessed where I am by now. In case you haven't – I'm in Tobruk. Quite a nice place, too, if I didn't have to move so much. Since I've been here I've shifted on an average of once every two days and have had to be ready for anything. Just at present I'm up in the front line defences. Nothing to worry about Sweet. If the Huns come they will get quite a reception.

Nothing of interest has happened here yet. A few air raids and a bit of shell fire, but that only breaks the monotony of the job. I wish to hell it was all over. It gets on one's nerves just waiting and doing nothing but watching. I get very little sleep of a night and have to try and make up for it during the day. It makes me feel tired all the time. Not a nice feeling at all and it doesn't put one in the mood for writing, either.

Well, Precious, I hope you will excuse the pencil. Ink's a scarcity here, as also are paper, stamps and envelopes. I've only got two sheets of paper and I have to write to Mum as well, so please excuse only one page.

I'm allowed now to mention a few places I've been to, or at least passed through since leaving Aussie. I won't give you the details, Sweet, as I haven't the space, so I'll tell them in the order I passed. First stop after leaving Aussie was Colombo. I had quite an enjoyable eight hours there. A chap with a car drove me and a pal around the town and we finished up at one of the best clubs and shouted Aussie beer all round. I only stayed in Palestine three weeks and I've told you everything I know about it. Leaving there I went to Mersa Matruh and Sidi Barrani in Egypt, and then on into Libya: Sollum, Bardia, Tobruk, Derna, Benghazi and then on to the front line about 150 miles further on. And now I'm back in Tobruk again to do it all over – or so it seems.

So you see, Sweet Heart, I've done a bit of travelling, eh, and camped out in the open all the time with only the stars for a roof. Generally not a bad life on the whole, but then, it hasn't rained yet. I don't know which would be the worst: the rain or the dust and sand. Under the circumstances I don't like either. I'm closing this till after tea. Cheerio, Sweet, till later.

NED

I FEEL A LOT BETTER NOW, Darling. I'm getting fed quite well. If it keeps up I'll be getting fat.

Precious, it's Anzac Day today. I suppose there was quite a big show over there, eh. I've put in a very quiet day. Up at 4 o'clock and watched the day break bright and clear. I only hope it was as good a day back there.

Well, Darling, I'll have to close. Hoping this finds you as well as it leaves me. Cheerio Sweet.



**Above:** Ned (second from left) at a Colombo club: "...we finished up at one of the best clubs and shouted Aussie beer all round" [Ned, NF75, 1941]

### Up at 4 o'clock

Edited extract, *Official History*: vol 3, 130

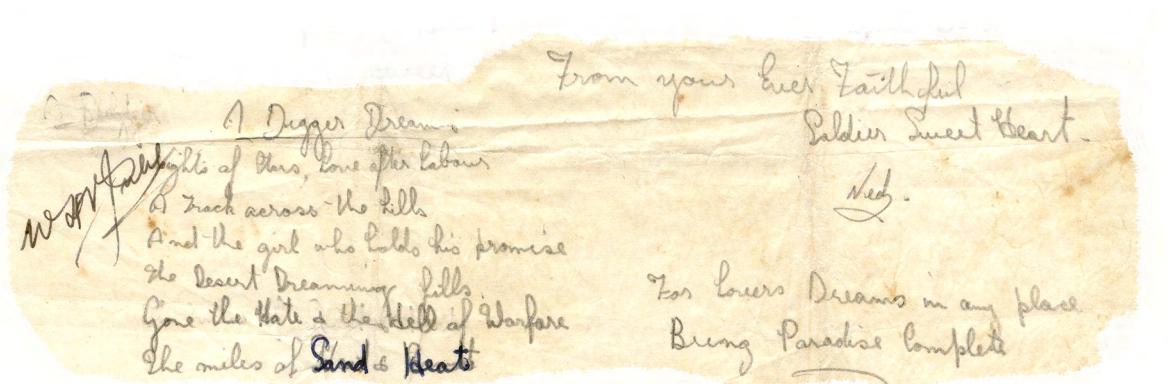
EACH DAY'S first light etched the desert scene in clear outline, but as the summer day warmed, a mirage would subtly transform it unless cloud or dust had blotted out the sun. The change was scarcely apparent at a casual glance: the colour, the broad masses were unaltered. But a more intent examination would fail to reveal the details of remembered features, which tantalisingly shimmered in eddies of sun-scorched air, as though seen through a watery glaze.

The mirages soon imposed a degree of regularity on artillery programs, for only in the early mornings or late evenings could artillery be ranged on targets by observation, or the effectiveness of their fire be gauged. As each new day dawned, the heavy guns of both sides saluted it; as it departed before the oncoming night, they saluted again.

### A Digger Dreams

Nights of stars, love after labour  
A track across the hills  
And the girl who holds his promise  
The desert dreaming fills.

Gone the hate and the hell of warfare  
The miles of sand and heat  
For lover's dreams in any place  
Bring paradise complete.



## NED WRITES TO HIS SISTER

DEAR MARJ – Received your welcome letter last Wednesday and was very delighted to hear from you. It's been quite a long time since I've written to you, or to any of the others for that matter, but there hasn't been much news to write about, or to be correct, not much news I was allowed to say. Now that they have lifted the censor a bit and I have a bit more spare time on hand I'll try to write a few more letters. The mail service here is very irregular. Letters to and from home are apt to be held up, which doesn't help a chap to write often for fear they will never get anywhere.

You were wanting to know what I thought of this country. I don't dare think or I'll go off my head. It's the worst place I've ever seen. What's not desert is big rocky hills, no trees and very little grass. It hasn't rained since I've been here and for that matter I hope it doesn't as I sleep with only the stars for a roof. The dust and sandstorms are just hell on earth. It gets everywhere no matter what you do. Since being in Libya I average one wash and shave a week. Sometimes I have to go without a bath for a couple of weeks and no clean clothes to change into. It's a grand life. To be honest I haven't had a decent bath since leaving Palestine and that's quite a time ago.

Well, Marj, I hope you can understand this scribble. I'm lying on the ground trying to write. I should be an expert at it by now, but I'm not quite. I'm sorry about the pencil, but it's due to the shortage of ink. I hope you will forgive me for it.

Things are very quiet over here at present. Nothing much to worry us, just a few air raids and a bit of shell fire.

Of course you know where I am – at Tobruk in the first line of defence. I don't suppose I'll be here for long, but if the Huns come they'll get quite a warm reception. That's all I can tell you about this part, Marj.

I'll tell you a few places I've passed through since leaving Aussie. Colombo was my first stop and I spent an enjoyable eight hours there. A chap picked up a cobbler and myself in his car and drove us all round the town and showed us their racecourse, as good as any in Aussie. I finished up in the "Prince's Club" one of the best clubs there, and shouted for all. Aussie beer it was, too. The town itself is very dirty, but the suburbs are pretty. Gardens all round the houses and in bloom at the time. There are hundreds of natives in the town itself and they try to sell you anything. And if you won't buy, they want you to give them something. They're a damn nuisance. It's nearly the same here. There's hundreds of Arabs with their sheep, camels, donkeys and dogs. God knows how they live or what they live on. It's a mystery. Anyway, I for one don't want to know.

After leaving Palestine (I was only there three weeks) I went to Mersa Matruh and Sidi Barrani in Egypt, and then into Libya to the front line about 150 miles past Benghazi. Most of the towns look nice and clean from a distance, being all white, but when nearer they're not as clean as they look.

As for seeing all I can while I'm here – nothing doing. I've seen enough. Colombo was the only leave I've had since leaving Queensland and it will be a long time before I get another chance, worse luck.

*QX3199, Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Wednesday, 30 April 1941*

I'm sorry about George Burns. I tried to find someone in his lot, but haven't succeeded yet, and now I haven't much hope of doing so.

I received a letter from Clive a couple of days ago and he was very disappointed about not coming over. Once he gets to this place he'll wish to hell he was out of it, I'll bet. It's the worst place God made, I'm thinking.

Well, Marj, give my love to all up there: Joy, Don, Barry and Max. Does he still play cricket and tennis like he used to do?

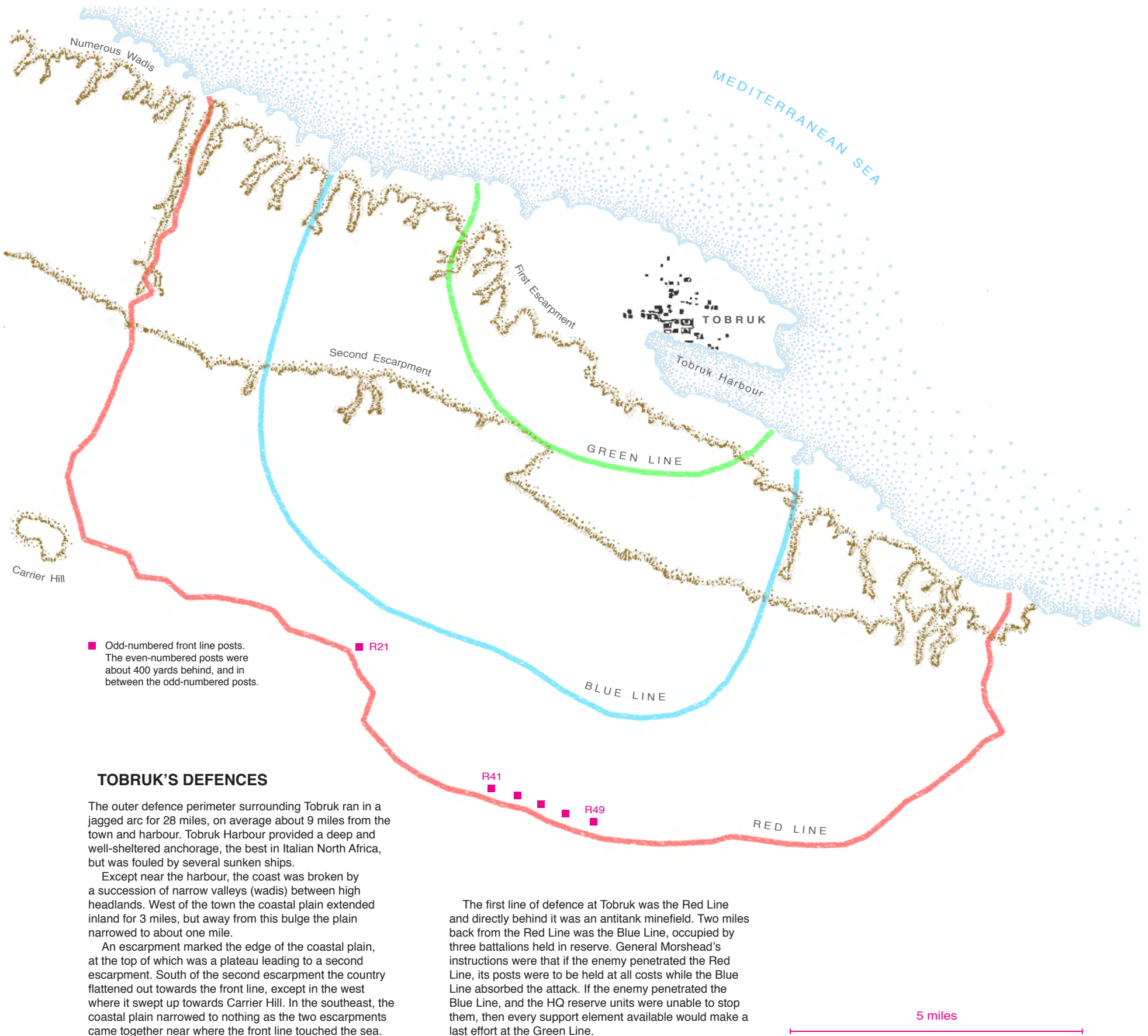
I'm glad you liked Dawn; and anyway, I don't take much notice of what Mum says about her. I told Dawn she could do what she liked as long as she kept true to me, and if she doesn't... well, I can't be worried here. I've got enough to think of – my own hide, eh Marj.

I'll have to close now as I want some sleep and I didn't get much last night, about two hours, and it might be the same tonight. Cheerio.

**Below:** Marj's children: Joy, Don and Barry.  
[Joy Burns, J45, ca 1941]







### TOBRUK'S DEFENCES

The outer defence perimeter surrounding Tobruk ran in a jagged arc for 28 miles, on average about 9 miles from the town and harbour. Tobruk Harbour provided a deep and well-sheltered anchorage, the best in Italian North Africa, but was fouled by several sunken ships.

Except near the harbour, the coast was broken by a succession of narrow valleys (wadis) between high headlands. West of the town the coastal plain extended inland for 3 miles, but away from this bulge the plain narrowed to about one mile.

An escarpment marked the edge of the coastal plain, at the top of which was a plateau leading to a second escarpment. South of the second escarpment the country flattened out towards the front line, except in the west where it swept up towards Carrier Hill. In the southeast, the coastal plain narrowed to nothing as the two escarpments came together near where the front line touched the sea.

The first line of defence at Tobruk was the Red Line and directly behind it was an antitank minefield. Two miles back from the Red Line was the Blue Line, occupied by three battalions held in reserve. General Morshead's instructions were that if the enemy penetrated the Red Line, its posts were to be held at all costs while the Blue Line absorbed the attack. If the enemy penetrated the Blue Line, and the HQ reserve units were unable to stop them, then every support element available would make a last effort at the Green Line.

5 miles

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF Abroad  
Thursday, 1 May 1941*

MY DEAREST DAWN – Well, Precious, I haven't heard from you for quite a while now. I suppose the mail has been held up again somewhere. Anyway, I hope my letters get through okay, or else you might be tempted not to write as often as before. There's no news here, Sweet. Everything seems at a stand still, so this will only be a short note I guess.

Did I tell you that I had heard from Clive? Well, I did, and he isn't too pleased about Darwin, the place he landed in. But he's better off if he stays where he is now. He'll know it soon enough if he lands in this country. I only wish I was back in Darwin. It was a luxury home compared with my quarters here. Anyway, the main thing is that I'm still in the best of health and carrying on, eh, Darling.

I often think of the good times we have had, and the rows, too, Precious.

How are they all up at Monto? Are they still wanting you to go home? Do you still go to Wynnum of a Sunday?

By the way, Sweet Heart, I sent you four snaps in my last letter. I hope you get them. Also, send me a couple of you, please Darling, and see if you can get one of Dad and Mum.

I'll have to close now if I want this letter to go tonight. Here's all my love to you, my Precious.

*From your ever Truly, Soldier's Friend, Ned.*

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn  
AIF Abroad  
Friday, 9 May 1941*

TO MY PRECIOUS DAWN – Well, Sweet, things are just the same here as they ever were, and I'm still in the same old place. There's one thing about being up in the front line and that is the accommodation here is better than anywhere else. You can at least get out of most of the dust storms, and I also consider myself a lot safer here, too.

Darling, I can't say anything about the situation here as there isn't anything to say. It has been very quiet lately, and if what one hears is true it will stay like it for a while yet. I think I'll have to scout about and try to find some news. The only trouble is, I would have to go over to the Hun's lines and they might not like it – or me. So I'd say that's out of the question, eh. Would you mind if I did? Anyway, Precious, I must write more than a page this time or you will think I'm lying down on the job. Matter of fact, I am too, and it's rather an awkward position to write in.

Well, Precious, it's getting too dark now to write, so I'll sign off till tomorrow. Cheerio, my precious Darling, and all my love.

*NED*

10.5.1941 – Well, Precious, I'm back again and feeling fairly tired as well, as I didn't get much sleep last night. The position here is unchanged and the only news that I've heard is bad news – there might not be any mail for another three weeks. So far it's only a rumour and I, for one, hope it remains so. It has been two weeks since I've received any news from you and if the rumour is true I'll have to wait another three weeks. It would make one swear, wouldn't it now.

I suppose the Ekka<sup>1</sup> will be on again soon. Have a good time for me, won't you, Darling. Give my love to Mother and Dad please, and tell them to keep their pecker up as I'll be back long before you think.

Darling, I guess I can't manage two pages yet, so I'll close this with lots of love to you and all at home. Cheerio.

*From your ever-loving soldier, NED*

P.S. I'm putting in a piece of poetry, or so called.  
Excuse the expressions in it, but it was given to me.  
*NED*

### **My Friends Who Stayed At Home**

I'm pulling off my colours, I'll fling my webb away  
I'm going down to Cairo to draw my bloody pay  
I'm tired of being a soldier, so help me Christ I am  
Of chewing mouldy biscuits, of chewing bread and jam  
Of fighting dirty Dagos out here all on my own  
When I think of dear old Aussie and my friends who stayed at home.

I bet they're walking down the streets their chests puffed out with pride  
And skiting to their cobbors how they saved their worthless hides  
When there's me out in the desert afraid to show my head  
For fear some dirty Dago will fill it full of lead.

When I told my mother I'd volunteered to fight  
She said "God bless you, Son, and bring you back all right."

They called me Chocolate Soldier, a two bob tourist, too  
They said you'll never see the front, or even get a view  
They said you'll have a picnic across the ocean foam  
They weren't game to face it, so the B---- stayed at home.

They are not bad sorts on a rabbit track  
But then there ain't no danger, cos rabbits don't shoot back  
They shine before a barmaid, they brag and are full of skite  
But at the corner of a street is where they do their fight  
A billiard cue their rifle, a bar their fighting zone  
For there ain't no bullets there, for my friends who stayed at home.

So I'll pick up my old Lee Enfield, buckle my webb about  
Though I'm only a fighting soldier, I'll see this damn war out  
And if I stop a bullet I'll die without a moan  
For they put the Kibosh on it, my friends who stayed at home.

1. The Royal Queensland Show, originally the Brisbane Exhibition (hence "Ekka"), held each August in Brisbane.



My Friends who Stayed at Home

I'm pulling off my colors, I'll fling my web away.  
 I'm going down to Cairo to draw my Bloody Pay.  
 I'm tired of being a Soldier, to help me Christ, I am.  
 Of chewing mouldy biscuits, of chewing bread & jam.  
 Of fighting dirty Dagoes out here all on my own.  
 When I think of Dear old Aussie & my friends who stayed ~~at~~ home.  
 I bet they're walking down the streets, their chests puffed out with pride.  
 And skittering to their cobbler's how they saved their worthless hides.  
 When there's me out on the Desert afraid to show my head.  
 For fear some dirty Dago will fill it full of lead.  
 When I told my Mother I'd volunteered to fight.  
 She said, "God Bless you, Son, & bring you back all right."  
 They called me Chocolate Soldier, a two bob tourist too.  
 They said you'll never see the front, or even get a view.  
 They said you'll have a picnic across the ocean foam.  
 They weren't game to face it as the B — stayed at home.  
 They <sup>had</sup> had carts on a rabbit track.  
 But then there ain't no danger, cos rabbits don't shoot back.  
 They shine before a Barmaid, they brag are full of Shite.  
 But at the corner of the street is where they do their fight.  
 A Billiard cue their rifle, a bar their fighting zone.  
 For there ain't no bullets there, for my friends who stayed at home.  
 So I'll pick up my old Lee Enfield, buckle my web about.  
 Though I'm only a fighting Soldier, I'll see this damn war out.  
 And if I stop a bullet, I'll die with an a moan.  
 For they put the kibosh on it, my friends who stayed at home.

W. H. P. G. 1916

Anon.

QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
 Tuesday, 13 May 1941

TO MY MOST PRECIOUS SWEET HEART – Well, Precious, I received two of your very welcome letters yesterday, the 12th, which was rather a coincidence<sup>1</sup> wasn't it, Darling. Maybe by this time next year I'll be back and we can get married, eh, Sweet, and keep the sequence running<sup>2</sup>. I think everything will be over by then. Anyway, I'm hoping for the best. Would that suit you, Sweet Heart?

Precious, your two letters cheered me up no end. I was feeling down in the dumps before I read them.

Well, Dawn Sweet, I've been up in the front line for about six weeks all told now. Not all at the one time of course, and I haven't fired a shot in real earnest yet. The Huns have been halted here, and also pushed back for the first time, and they don't like it either. Once they retreat in this place it's their finish and it's all only a matter of time now.

Well, Darling, everything else here is still the same. The monotony of just watching and waiting makes one wonder what he joined up for. That's about all the news over here at present, Sweet, so I'll change the subject and also change the ink in this pen as it won't write properly, damn it...

Now that's a little bit better, eh, Sweet. It looks it, anyway.

Well, Precious, I got quite a stack of mail last night. Seven letters in all: two from you, two from Mother, one from your father, and one from Josie Carroll, from Maryborough. Also one from McWhirters Ltd to tell me that they had been given an order for a hamper to be sent to me. I'm wondering just who it is that has sponsored me? Can you enlighten me, Sweet, as I'm quite in the dark, so far.

1. The coincidence was that Ned received the two letters on the second anniversary of first meeting Dawn.
2. Ned was hoping to "keep the sequence running" by marrying Dawn on the third anniversary of their first meeting.

About the letter from your father, Darling. He gave me all the farm news and says he could do with your help – and then goes on to say that he supposed you would please yourself, or me. He didn't know which. He always adds that little touch in, doesn't he. They seem to be doing quite well on the farm now, or were when the letter was written.

So Marj was still at Wynnum when you wrote last. I wrote to her at Biloela, but I don't suppose she will get it till she returns. I'm glad you like her and got on okay together. It's funny, but when I used to work for Max and Marj on their farm, she and I used to argue half the day and the other half we would be plotting up something together. Clive and I were the same, too. I've had more rows and fights with both of them than all the rest put together.

How do you like Joy and Don? Would you like a pair like them?

Well, Darling, all I do here is sleep, eat, smoke and do sentry duty, and I feel always tired. One's sleep is broken up too much to get a decent rest. When I'm back in Aussie in civvies again with three square meals a day, and eight hours' sleep, and clean clothes, and at least one bath a day, I'll take my hat off and say: "Thank God" – and mean it.

I often wonder what occupation I'll serve in when I get back. What do you want me to do, Sweet? By the way, Darling, before I forget, thanks very much for the stamps and paper. They came in handy.

Darling, you want to know if I've still got your photo. I always carry it with me, next to my heart. And that night when you slipped in between the train and platform – of course I remember. I got a hell of a scare. The worst I've ever had. Also, Sweet Heart, I'll never forget those few mad weeks between returning from Darwin and leaving for here. They were mad, weren't they. I didn't really know whether I was on my head or what.

Darling, I love you more than I can say on paper. You know I love and trust you, but I wouldn't be human if I wasn't a bit jealous. I only wish we were together again, Sweet Heart, if only for a few months, and then I'd go anywhere with you. It was awful when we saw each other and then we had to part. I can still see your sadness when the train pulled out of South Brisbane, and I always will, too, Dearest.

Sweet Heart, I'll say cheerio till next I write. May God bless you and look after you till I come back.

From your always lover  
 NED



Left: Letter 13 from overseas, received by Dawn 13 June. This is an example of what Ned calls a "green envelope". The contents of a green envelope were to refer to nothing but private and family matters. Reference to other matters, even though not otherwise censorable, was not permitted.

Opposite: Letter 15 from overseas, received by Dawn 20 June.



QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
 Tuesday, 20 May 1941

MY DEAREST DAWN – Well, Darling, it's just a week today since I last wrote to you and nothing has changed here. I'm still in the same old hole, but it's likely that I'll be moving from the front line very soon. I hope I get near enough to the beach to be able to have a bath as I'm badly in need of one.

At last, Darling, I've been in action. I went out with a patrol a couple of nights ago and attacked one of the Hun's posts about 2 miles out. Done up about 30 Huns. Luckily, we surprised them and they didn't get much of a chance to do anything, so we all returned. It was rather an interesting night, all told, when one looks back on it. Something to remember, at any rate<sup>1</sup>.

Well, Darling, you had better show everyone at Wynnum this letter as there isn't any writing paper here now. I happened to find this in my pack and it's the last, so I won't be able to write to Mum and Dad till I get some more. God knows when that might be. Mightn't be for quite a while. So show everyone, please, or next time I write to them it will be on the back of your old letters. How would you like that, eh, Sweet?

Have you heard from Clive yet? I wrote a letter to him in the Northern Territory. I suppose he will have it by now if he's still there. By the way, Sweet Heart, it takes your letter on average about 20 days to get here, so now you know.

Well, Darling, I think that ends the news. Give my love to Mother and Dad and everyone else you meet. Cheerio, Precious. Best wishes and all my love.

From yours ever truly  
 NED

1. Ned is typically offhand about the danger he was in. Contrary to his comment that the Germans "didn't get much of a chance to do anything" the patrol was fired upon and three men injured, one of whom died later of his wounds. A description of what occurred is in the sidebar, right (see Monday 19 May).

2. There are three types of patrolling. A *fighting patrol* has sufficient size to take on the enemy. It differs from an attack in that the aim is not to hold ground. A *recce patrol* has the task of gathering

information and tends to avoid contact. A *standing patrol*, in contrast to a fighting or recce patrol, remains stationary. Once in position it is not free to manoeuvre without permission. Its task is to provide early warning and security. Sometimes, as in the case of the standing patrol sent out on 19 May (see sidebar), it lies in waiting, ready to ambush.

3. MT: Military Transport

4. Arty: artillery

5. CQM: Company Quartermaster



### At last, Darling, I've been in action

THE ACTION that Ned refers to occurred during a fighting patrol<sup>2</sup> that was sent out on Sunday night, 18 May. The 'D' Company Diary tells the story:

*Thursday 15 May* – Uneventful night except for an air raid on Tobruk at approximately 0400 hrs. Patrols returned with no enemy activity to report, save for some movement of enemy MT<sup>3</sup>.

Considerable arty<sup>4</sup> activity on our part this morning.

*Friday 16 May* – Heavy shelling by our arty during early hours of morning, on posts held by enemy. Patrols returned. Little to report beyond slight movement of MT. All quiet on our front.

In addition to our usual patrols, a special recce patrol from 16 Platoon was sent out a distance of 4000 yards.

*Saturday 17 May* – Our arty opened a heavy barrage on the posts held by the enemy at 0500 hrs this morning. Reports are that we made a successful attack, regaining some posts.

Our special recce patrol of last night returned with information that they had sighted enemy, approximately platoon strength, dug in around outside perimeter at 4000 yards.

Usual patrols sent out.

*Sunday 18 May* – Very quiet night. About 4000 yards on our left flank we have brought forward two guns and they are firing desultorily. On the whole, the day has been very quiet. By far the hottest day we have experienced.

In addition to our usual recce patrols, we sent out a fighting patrol of one officer (Lieut C. Guest) and 13 other ranks.

*Monday 19 May* – At a few minutes after midnight one of our recce patrols encountered an enemy patrol in the vicinity of Post 31. A number of shots were exchanged with no casualties on either side.

At 0205 hrs two green flares were sighted, the signal that Lieut Guest's fighting patrol had met trouble. The patrol returned at 0350 hrs. They had been very successful, killing and wounding over 30 Germans and taking one prisoner.

Our losses were three wounded: QX3337, Pte G.W. Garrad of 17 Platoon, shot through the chest; QX0909, Pte J.G. Dan of 16 Platoon, a bullet through the shoulder; and QX2691, S. Tickner, a slight bullet graze on the leg. Pte Garrad's condition is serious.

The battalion 2IC asked that the thanks of the battalion be conveyed to Lieut Guest and his men for a fine piece of work.

Usual patrols. In addition, a standing patrol of one officer (Lieut Williams) and 10 other ranks went out in the hope of ambushing an enemy patrol which has been encountered several times near Post 31. They had no luck.

*Tuesday 20 May* – Nothing of interest to report. Desultory shelling throughout the night. Not a barrage, simply annoyance value. Patrols returned safely.

Very hot all day and the company was short of water. Fortunately, the CQM<sup>5</sup> sent us a few drums which saved the situation.

Usual patrols.

*Wednesday 21 May* – Quiet night. Pte Garrad, who was seriously wounded in the fighting patrol on Monday morning, died last night, the first in the company to be K.I.A.

Our usual patrols went out.

QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
 Tuesday, 27 May 1941

TO MY DARLING DAWN – Sorry, Darling, that I haven't written this reply sooner, but I haven't had too much time on my hands the last four or five days. I'm out of the front line now and on reserve. Supposed to be having a spell, but instead we go out digging reserve positions every day<sup>1</sup>. Very nice and restful as you can imagine.

First day on reserve we had a lovely sandstorm. You could hardly see 2 yards in front of you at times. It's one of the worst I've been in since arriving here. It must have been meant as a special welcome back, I think. Anyway, it was rather rotten after not having had a sandstorm for over a month while up in the front.

Darling, I have a message to take out now, so I may not get this letter finished till tomorrow.

WELL, I'M BACK, and since it's not quite dark yet, Sweet, I'll carry on for a bit. Last Sunday I spent the most enjoyable day since arriving here. A few of us went down to the beach for a swim, and wasn't it great. The water was slightly cool, but it was the first swim since going up to Benghazi, and

that was quite a while ago. You can guess how we enjoyed it. I was only wishing I was back in Aussie on one of the beaches with you, but I suppose it would be rather cold there now. Anyway, cold or not it would suit me.

The Huns landed a few shells a while ago but didn't do any damage. They very seldom do.

Darling, I'll have to resume this tomorrow if I get time, as it's getting too dark to write. Cheerio, Sweet Heart.

*Pleasant dreams*  
 NED

28.5.1941 – Well, Precious, back again and not for long, either, as it's nearly dark now. They gave us a surprise this afternoon – we went swimming again, straight from our digging. And was it welcome? I'll say it was! It's getting hot over here now and a swim every day wouldn't go amiss. Matter of fact, it would make Tobruk seem a lot better than it does now.

1. As part of Tobruk's defences, a series of fallback positions behind the existing front line were constructed. 'D' Company spent

the last five days of May digging new positions, probably in the vicinity of the Blue Line or the Green Line. See map, p121.

**Below:** Members of Ned's battalion on the beach at Tobruk.  
 [Ned, NF52, 1941]





Well, Precious, I'm sorry, but I'll have to shut up again. I'll take this out on the job tomorrow and finish it there, eh. Goodnight, Darling. Third try's luckiest, or so they say, and that will be tomorrow.

*Lots of love*  
NED

29.5.1941 – Here again, Darling, and still as healthy as ever the Rats of Tobruk<sup>1</sup> will be, as the Huns will find out to their sorrow if we come out of our holes.

Well, Precious, things are very quiet. An air raid or two today, but nothing much really – and they weren't anywhere near us. There's nothing much to tell you about this place. Things are normal, and when one says it's normal, well, there's just nothing doing. I get up each morning, have breakfast, and then off to work digging. Back again in the afternoon, have tea, fix up a few things in and about my dugout, write a line or two, listen to the news (or versions of the news), and then pile into my dugout to bed. That's my general doings for the day. I have a holiday tomorrow, or so I hope.

Darling, if you or Mother ever send a parcel over to me, put in a few ounces of State Express tobacco and a few packets of Zig Zag papers, will you, please? It would be great to get some Aussie smokes for a change. They are nearly all ready-made



smokes we get here, and what's not is pipe tobacco. It would be good to get something decent for a change.

Well, Precious, how is everything at home? Home? When I get back, Sweet, I won't need a home to live in – I'll just burrow a hole in the ground and live there. It will do me. How about you, eh?

Well, Darling, I've run out of ink so I'll close this. Excuse the small writing, but I have to cram everything into one sheet as we are still short of paper. Give my love to all at home and elsewhere. Wishing you the best, Sweet Heart.

*From yours ever truly*  
NED

P.S. Thanks, Darling, for thinking of me when buying that present for Mother's Day. It was sweet of you, Dearest. I sent a card to Mum from here, but don't know if it arrived.

*Love NED*

1. Ned took up the name "Rats of Tobruk" surprisingly quickly, only a few days after it was coined by Lord Haw Haw, the German radio propaganda broadcaster, who described the men defending Tobruk as rats living in the ground. The first mention in the *D' Company Diary* is on 27 May: "Weather still clear and men off to their digging again. According to German radio, the enemy is due to enter Tobruk tomorrow. We'll be pleased to see them. Lord Haw Haw has caused a certain amount of amused resentment by referring to us as "Rats of Tobruk". That resentment will be vented on the next German attack.

## BUSH ARTILLERY

Edited extracts, *Official History*: vol 3, 239;  
*Tobruk*: 91, 247-48.

DURING the early months of the siege, the infantry were perilously short of essential weapons such as Bren Guns and mortars. In time they made up for this by salvaging captured Italian weapons. Weak also in antitank artillery, the infantry recovered Italian field guns, which had been lying abandoned since the capture of Tobruk, and set them in position for antitank defence. Few of these had sights or instruments, but they were soon giving valuable support to the regular guns and became known as the "bush artillery". In many cases the range could be varied only by putting another chock under the wheels or taking one away. Consequently, when raiding parties brought in vital parts from captured guns too heavy to retrieve, the bush artillerymen were delighted. The guns were originally manned by "all hands and the cook", but in course of time many of the crews were more selectively chosen and were usually commanded by officers having some training in the handling of medium-range weapons.

The almost inexhaustible ammunition left in Tobruk by the Italians made the bush artillery most valuable. They could continue firing when rationing restricted others. It was no soft job. Guns could blow up when shells exploded in the barrel, and the bush artillerymen soon learnt to fire their guns by remote control from the safety of a sangar with the

aid of a length of rope.

From an infantryman's plaything, the bush artillery became an important part of Tobruk's defences. The diarist of the 2/28th Battalion noted on 1 May that the unit now had 11 guns manned as antitank weapons, and that they had already accounted for nine enemy vehicles.

These guns, being more active than regular ones, had the disadvantage of inviting enemy retaliation to such an extent that the normal routine was a dozen rounds and dash for cover. Because of this, units stationed near bush artillery regarded its support with some misgivings. One gun was particularly unpopular with neighbouring troops. Located in a wadi, its crew charged passers-by "two piastres a pop" for the privilege of firing. The crew's position might have been financially strategic, but they were not on the best of terms with the reserve battalion that had its headquarters in the same wadi. Whenever business was brisk for the gunners, enemy reprisals made life uncomfortable for their neighbours. Finally, the Colonel appealed to Brigadier Thompson and the gun was removed.

## RUSSIA'S ENTRY INTO THE WAR

Edited extract, *Official History*: vol 3, 287

A NEW CAUSE for hope of victory over Germany (and for the Tobruk garrison, of relief in the intervening time) came when the news of Germany's

declaration of war against Russia flashed round the world on 22nd June. That night, in hollows and caves and dugouts in Tobruk, all who were able gathered around radio sets and heard the eloquent, inspired voice of the British Prime Minister denouncing the Nazi war machine and the "group of villainous men" who planned "this cataract of horrors". He declared that there was but one aim and one single purpose – the destruction of Hitler and every vestige of the Nazi regime:

*We shall fight him by land, we shall fight him by sea, we shall fight him in the air, until, with God's help, we have rid the earth of his shadow and liberated its people from his yoke.*

But it is of interest that most diaries and daily news sheets (which several units were now producing) accorded the arrival of mail with greater significance. Next day the editor of *Mud and Blood*, the news sheet of the 2/23 Battalion, wrote: "There's no doubt about it, when a mail arrives our whole outlook changes". Further along in the issue he added: "perhaps a little of our jubilation today is occasioned by the good news from overseas". The diarist of another unit remarked: "3000 letters have arrived, to our great joy. The unit is as happy as if it were going on leave..." Another commented on the involvement of Russia:

All hope it may help our cause, but few seem to expect the Russians to hold out for very long.

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Saturday, 7 June 1941*

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Lo, Darling. Just a line to let you know all's okay with me over this side of the world and I hope it's the same over there with you. Everything is very quiet. Has been for a damn long time now, too. Matter of fact, it gets on one's goat living in this desert and doing nothing towards getting out of it.

Well, Precious, nothing of interest has happened over here to tell you about, and I haven't had any mail from over there for quite a while now. It seems to us that they are holding back a devil of a lot at base. I haven't received any parcels yet, though I know they have been sent. Altogether it's a darn nuisance.

Sweet Heart, I never thought I'd spend my 21st in a foreign country, let alone at Tobruk in the Libyan desert sitting in a dugout in the front line. Did you? Oh, well, I'll make up for it when I get back. We will, won't we? What says you, eh?

Well, Precious, I think I'll leave this till tonight and see if there's any mail. I won't be writing home this week as I haven't any more stamps left, so tell them at home I'm okay and in the pink and enjoying myself to the best of my ability.

All my love to you, Dearest.

*From yours ever  
NED*

WELL, MY LOVE, no mail yet, though there is a rumour of some being in. We are just wondering what they mean – in Tobruk or somewhere else? Anyway, I for one hope it's here.

The Huns gave us a bit of a scare today. They bombed a place just near us and slung a few bullets about. Nothing much all told. If they only do what they have been doing up till now we are quite safe.

We all got quite a surprise this morning. One of our own planes came over. All the boys downed tools to have a look and a few cheers were sent up. It's an occasion when one of our own flies over, as it only happens about twice a month. They're doing their jobs in other places I suppose. At least I hope so.

Well, Precious, all's quiet again. You wouldn't think there was a war on here, the way we get about. I've got my Gat<sup>1</sup> oiled-up ready for the Hun's planes to come back, but I know I'm waiting in vain as I don't think they'll return. Some of the boys say they saw two Hun planes shot down, so two out of about 20 isn't too bad, considering we haven't any planes of our own to take them on, only AA<sup>2</sup> guns.

Just at present I'm suffering more pain than any Hun's likely to inflict on me: a b--- boil on the back of my neck. Must be the rich tucker coming out – bully beef and sand, eh. At any rate, being in Tobruk has its compensations. We get better and more tucker than we used to.

Darling, I've told you everything I can think of so I'll close this letter. Give them my love and tell them I'm still okay.

*Cheerio and sweet dreams  
NED*

## *I am definitely not coming to the next war*

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Thursday, 19 June 1941*

TO MY DEAREST DAWN – Well, Precious, just a note to let you know I'm still in the land of the living and getting along okay. I haven't heard from you for quite a while now. Mail is a thing of the past. As far as we know, it is being held back at base till we get relieved here and go back for a spell and collect it. I suppose by that time there will be enough mail waiting for me that it will take a whole day to read it all and another five or six to answer, worse luck.

Darling, as far as news is concerned, there's nothing to report. You know more about the war than I do because news here is like our mail – a thing of the past. They have even put us on a bully beef diet again. I'm just waiting to see if they issue dry biscuits now instead of bread. If they do that, all we'll need then is a few nice sandstorms and we'll think we are still at Marsa Brega, and all the rest is a dream – and a bad one at that, eh.

Darling, you will have to accept my apologies for not writing before this, but paper, envelopes and ink are as scarce as the devil himself, and one can't write without them. And anyway, there's nothing to write about. Nothing changes here and we keep doing the same things over and over again. Jerry sends over a few bullets now and again, and we signal him a few misses in return, and then we go back to our dugouts and try to sleep or interest ourselves in one thing or another.

Just to give you an idea how things are, Sweet: yesterday I picked up an old rifle covered in rust and spent three hours cleaning it just for want of something to interest me. And when I do things like that, well, I guess there's not much happening. Maybe by the time I write my next letter I'll be enjoying a bit of leave, unless of course, they don't think we have earned it and leave us here.

How is everything back in Queensland? It seems a hell of a lot more than six months since I left there, and four of them spent in the desert. Anyway, I am definitely not coming to the next war – not if it's anywhere near a desert I'm not.

By the way, Sweet Heart, when you next write to your father explain why I can't reply just now and tell him I'll write as soon as possible, will you please? I received his letter some time ago and I suppose he's a bit peeved at me for not answering it.

Dawn, Sweet Heart, I'll have to close down. There's nothing more to say except the all important, I love you. Give my regards to all you meet, Sweet. All my love to you and the best of wishes.

*From yours ever truly  
NED*

1. Gatling machine gun. Ned may have been using the term Gat as a generic term for machine gun.

2. AA – anti aircraft.

**Opposite:** Crash site of RAF pilot shot down over Tobruk. The pilot was buried under the pile of rocks, and his head gear placed on top of the cross.  
[Ned, NF53, 1941]



*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Monday, 23 June 1941*

TO MY DEAREST SWEET HEART – Well, Dawn, I received your ever-welcome letter last night and it was *very* welcome, too, as I hadn't heard from you for 30 days and was wondering just what was going on. As for those snaps I sent, Precious, there's been two lots: one lot from up at Marsa Brega and the others from here. They must have got lost somewhere on the way, so you don't seem to be getting all my letters. For that matter, I'm not getting all yours, either.

Well, Darling, everything is very quiet here and we are just plodding along as usual. I'm feeling pretty damn tired today as I was one of a covering party out in no-man's-land last night covering some of our boys working. We were out six hours and no sign of Jerry, except a few shots now and again. He seems very nervous in the dark. He rattles off a few

thousand rounds each night at nothing in particular. You would think someone had given him a new toy to play with, the way he carries on. Anyway, he's not hurting anyone, so we just let him play.

I'm sorry, Darling, but there's not much to write about in this damn hole. You say Mr Menzies is back. He's had quite a trip. He gave a speech one night at a picture show in Palestine and that was ages ago, just a few nights after we landed there.

I'll say cheerio as there's nothing more I can think of. Excuse the pencil, but I've got to save the ink for the envelopes. Give my regards to all back there, Darling. All my love and fond wishes, Sweet Heart.

*From yours ever truly  
NED*



*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Saturday, 28 June 1941*

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Lo, Precious. Received a couple more of your welcome letters last Wednesday. They were some of the ones that were held back. The one with the snaps hasn't arrived yet, worse luck, although I have received one written just before and one just after. Maybe I'll get it in the next mail. I hope so, anyway. I want to see if you still look the same. Do you?

Well, Precious, since writing last I have moved forward into another position slightly closer to the Huns. Here we have to do all our work at night and sleep by day. It's a bit of a nuisance working in the dark, but there are advantages. It's cooler and there are no flies to worry you – or Huns, either – like there would be in daytime. So it suits us okay. It's getting a bit cool, Sweet Heart, so I'll say cheerio till tomorrow and go get dressed.

*Lots of love  
NED*

1.7.1941 – Here I am again, Sweet. Sorry to be a couple of days late, but I haven't been feeling the best for the last two or three days. I'm feeling okay again now – that is, the best one can feel in this hole.

Everything is still very quiet here and looks like remaining so. I hope it does, because we must be nearly due to go back on reserve for a bit of a rest.

I received a cablegram from Mother on Sunday wishing me all the best for my 21st. Will you please thank Mum for me, Sweet. I can't write myself at present because there are no envelopes. Matter of fact, I haven't one for this, so maybe this won't go for some time.

There's no need, Sweet, for you or Mother to worry about me, and anyway it won't do any good, so please don't. I'll be coming back, and then maybe you'll wish I hadn't, eh. What do you say?

I saw a nice fireworks show last night. The Huns were bombing Tobruk from the air and the streams of tracers going up was a sight to behold. You couldn't imagine it back there. You have to see it. They were over again today. Only a few and they kept pretty high. They don't like the AA Guns.

Well, Dearest, I think I've bored you enough by all this nonsense, eh, so I'll draw to a close. Give my love to all at home. Oh, and thanks for your artistic efforts on your letters, Dearest. Cheerio, Sweet Heart. All the best to you and lots of love.

*From yours ever truly  
NED*

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Wednesday, 9 July 1941*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, I'm very sorry for the delay in sending this letter, but I've just managed to get an envelope. Money can't buy them here. I have received about four of your letters since starting this letter. Also received your cablegram today and those snaps you sent. Quite a sight for sore eyes, Sweet. As for you saying they weren't much good, they're the best I've got.

Darling, I'm living in a tent for the first time since leaving Palestine<sup>1</sup>. Quite a while, eh. During the last three or four days I've been having quite a good time. We have been relieved from the front line and are allowed to go swimming at Happy Valley, the only decent spot in Tobruk. It's great, too, lying all day in the sand and enjoying ourselves in general. From here we can get down for a swim every second day, or so they tell us. So we are not too bad off, are we.

Well, Dawn, Jerry gave us one hell of a fright a couple of nights ago. A few of the boys, including myself, were talking together around midnight and a plane flew over. Just before passing overhead it unloaded about 10 bombs. Talk about a scatter. It was the quickest I've moved in a long time. In about ½ second we all had our noses in the dirt in the bottom of a 12" crawl trench. No doubt about it – lightning hasn't anything on us when we get going.

Dearest, you will have to excuse this letter as the boys are coming into the tent and interrupting me, and now that they are all gone I can't think of anything else to say. So, Precious, I think I'll close. Cheerio, Sweetest. Many happy returns for the 5th August – and may I be there next time. All my love and lots of luck, Darling.

*From yours ever truly  
NED*

1. 'D' Company had moved to the Tobruk aerodrome on the night of 8-9 July. They were on reserve duties, digging defences in the Green Line. See map p121. On 27 July they moved to the Blue Line.

### ***I saw a nice fireworks show last night***

Edited extracts, *Official History*: vol 3, 409-417

THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK was not, like other famous sieges, a struggle for survival in the face of dire shortages of food or water or munitions. Shortages there were at times, but never so acute that men were starving, or guns without rounds to fire. For this the main credit must go to the Royal Navy and Tobruk's anti-aircraft artillery. This protective battle was won only by continually improving operating practice and developing new techniques to cope with each change in the enemy's method of attack.

Tobruk's anti-aircraft gunners had to deal with four main types of attack: daylight dive-bombing raids,

daylight high-level attacks, night-bombing raids and night-mining raids. As the defenders improved their technique and fire power, the enemy changed the method of attack. At first, daylight raids predominated, more than half of them dive-bombing raids. As time went on, the frequency of dive-bombing attacks diminished and of night raids increased.

From 10th April till 9th October, 3525 aircraft were engaged by anti-aircraft fire over Tobruk; 40 anti-aircraft gunners were killed and 128 wounded; more than 125,000 rounds of ammunition were fired, in addition to the many thousands of rounds from

captured Italian weapons; and only one day was free of the sound of an air raid warning. During the same period, 74 aircraft were reported as definitely destroyed, 59 probably destroyed and 145 damaged. No aircraft was reported destroyed unless seen to crash.

The struggle to hold Tobruk was waged not only around its perimeter and in the sky above its port, but on its sea lanes and above them. The army in Tobruk could not have held its ground but for men in ships, and men flying aeroplanes protecting those ships.



QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Bn, AIF Abroad  
Friday, 18 July 1941

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Well, Precious, I received your ever-welcome letter yesterday and was very pleased to hear from you again. Everything is very quiet here, Darling, and I'm still in the same place, which is quite pleasant considering some of the places we've been in. We generally manage to get one swim daily now, and we'll miss them when we have to go up front again.

For the last couple of days there has been a fair amount of dust blowing about and it's a damn nuisance. It gets in everywhere and makes life more miserable than it is generally. Life is quite bad enough in this place without having dust storms to top it off, worse luck.

Darling, I've just arrived back from a swim and just had tea. Not a bad tea, either. The CQ opened his heart and we had steak<sup>1</sup>. Not too bad for Tobruk, eh? Since we moved back here the tucker has improved no end. Sometimes we even get a decent meal. No doubt you wouldn't call it decent back there, and neither would I for that matter, but here, well, that's quite another story altogether.

I haven't the least hope of finishing this tonight as it's nearly dark now, so I'll say cheerio till the morning.

Love and kisses  
NED

DEAREST, the last week or so I've been able to listen to the BBC news every night and everything seems to be getting better. It's great to be able to listen to the news and a bit of music for a change. There's an RAF tent quite handy to us, and we go over there for the broadcasts.

I can't think of any more news, Sweet, and I've got to clean up the old Gat this afternoon, worse luck. Give my love to all at home, Darling, and tell them I'm okay and enjoying the best possible health that one's liable to enjoy in this place.

Cheerio, Sweet Heart. Lots of luck and best wishes for the 5th.

*P.S. By the way, Dawn, Jack Tooth.  
The boys you wanted to know about  
was killed in action 3 who's ago today.*

*I am your  
loving friend  
Ned.*

*E. J. Flewell-Smith*

1. The supply ship *Miranda* berthed in Tobruk on 1 July with 150 tons of meat, the first delivery of fresh meat since May. See *Flies & Supplies* p132.
2. The number of men in the company is given in the form: officers x other ranks. e.g. 4 x 62 means there are four officers and 62 other ranks.

**Right:** Letter 21 from overseas. Postmarked 20 July, received by Dawn 7 August.



### **P.S. By the way, Dawn, Jack Tooth...**

Edited extracts, 'D' Company Diary

**Saturday 28 June** – This afternoon, QX5318 Pte J.H. Cairns was killed instantly by a bullet from a sniper. Just at dusk, QX5103 Pte W.H. Castles was wounded through the upper arm by a sniper.

Tonight we sent out a fighting patrol, objective to capture prisoners or to kill and bring in enemy identity discs. This is a dangerous undertaking due to the number of booby traps. Lieut Carter of 16 Platoon in charge.

**Sunday 29 June** – 'D' Company's blackest day. Our fighting patrol wiped out by the explosion of three land mines. Three wounded men managed to come back to our lines. They are:

QX5571...	Cpl A.D. Leslie, wounds in legs and chest.
QX6712...	Pte F.G. Wills, wound in head.
QX5750...	Pte G.A. Parry, broken wrist, wounded in leg and arm.

The other four

QX810...	Lieut F.W. Carter
QX10168...	Pte W. Edwards
QX6885...	Pte J.T. Tooth
QX5891...	Pte C.R. Kidd

are missing and almost certainly all dead. One wounded man reports that Lieut Carter was badly wounded in head, probably dead. This applies also to Pte Kidd. Pte Edwards blown to pieces. Pte Tooth very badly hurt, and it is thought that his struggles exploded a third mine. The bodies are still out there and we have only the faintest idea of their position. It will be extremely dangerous, almost foolhardy, to attempt to recover the bodies. It must be added that Cpl Leslie, although badly wounded, clung to his machine gun until he reached our lines.

'D' Company strength is now 4 x 62 with 35 attached and 9 detached, giving a total of 4 x 88 in the line. We marched out 5 x 140 strong<sup>2</sup> from Gaza.

**Monday 30 June** – Definitely established that the four men are dead. Their bodies can be seen about 200 yards from our wire. This evening Pte Gordon was shot through the head by a machine gun bullet as 17 Platoon ration party was coming in. He is very badly wounded and appears unlikely to live.

An attempt was made to recover the bodies of the fighting patrol this evening. Two engineers and some of 'D' Company went out. In the immediate vicinity of the bodies the engineers rendered 24 mines harmless. The body of Pte Jack Tooth was brought in safely, but as Pte Kidd's body was being put on a stretcher, another mine exploded and Pte Webb of 18 Platoon was killed instantly; Pte Huntley, stretcher bearer for 18 Platoon, was wounded badly; and the two engineers were wounded in the leg.

The bodies of the three men from the fighting patrol are still out there.

**Tuesday 1 July** – A quiet day after all the disaster. The men are badly shaken and it is hoped that we shall soon be relieved.

QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
 Friday, 25 July 1941

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, I haven't received any news from you since I last wrote. I'm sorry if I'm a bit late, but I've been waiting for your letter to arrive. Everything is much the same, except during the last two days we have been suffering a severe sandstorm. The wind is still blowing tonight, but I have hopes of a clear day tomorrow and I would like to have a decent clean up again. Because of the sand, by the time one gets back from a swim you are just as dirty as before you went.

Well, Darling, I'm writing by candlelight at present and I'm afraid it's on its last legs and there are no more. It's a race against time to see who finishes first, the candle or me. So cheerio, my Love, till morning.

*Love and kisses*  
 NED

WELL, DARLING, I'm back on the job again and I'm damned if I can think of anything interesting to say. It's another rotten day and I'm feeling a bit peeved with life in general. To think that one hasn't had a decent meal in five months, and isn't likely to get another for a couple of more to come, well, it's enough to make one swear, isn't it.

We received another inoculation last Tuesday, the first since being over here. I think it was about the worst we've received so far. Most of us were feeling a bit crook next day, worse luck.

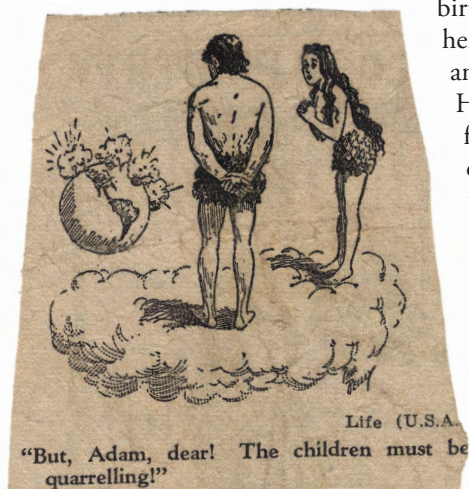
One of the boys received some papers and books this morning and everyone is reading and talking, and here's me trying to write a letter. I've got six or seven letters to write and I just can't think of anything to put in them. I haven't the envelopes to send them anyway, but it would be a relief to have them all written. I just can't get in the mood for writing lately. To my mind now, it's worse to write one letter than do an hour's work. I guess this place has got me down and if I don't get out soon I'll go off my rocker.

When I get back I'm going to settle down in the greenest spot in Queensland, in the mountains somewhere, and live there for the rest of my life. Do you think it will suit you, Darling?

By the time you get this your birthday will be over. Anyway, here's hoping you enjoy yourself and many happy returns, Sweet Heart. I'll send you some money for your birthday and you can decide what you would like best yourself. Also, I'm sending some to Mother as soon as I get her latest address.

I'll close now. Sending you all my love, and hoping this finds you as well as it leaves me. Cheerio, my Precious.

*From yours every truly*  
 NED



Cutting included with Ned's letter of 25 July 1941

## FLIES & SUPPLIES

Edited extracts, 'D' Company Diary; Official History: vol 3, 292-3

*Sunday 15 June* – Very hot. Lazy sort of day. Life is made almost unbearable during the day by the heat and flies. They swarm everywhere and we have scarcely any means of lessening their numbers. They are getting worse by leaps and bounds. If we are not relieved soon an epidemic of some kind appears inevitable. Nearly everyone has dysentery.

*Thursday 19 June* – Sandstorm blowing up. It has mitigated the fly nuisance. Even though it means exchanging one unpleasantness for another, the change from flies to sand is welcome.

BY JUNE, two months had elapsed since the siege of Tobruk began. The prolonged front-line duty, the unchallenged domination of Tobruk skies by hostile aircraft, the intensifying heat, the unpalatable, unchanging diet, and the monotony began to produce noticeable effects, revealed both in a general lassitude and in a lessening of the élan that had characterised the patrolling and raiding activities of the first weeks of the siege. One battalion commander wrote in the unit war diary for June:

All ranks are undoubtedly jaded, yet to go into a rear area only offers the usual digging tasks with no active patrolling. Some form of amusement is vitally needed to maintain a sense of balance, especially if we are to be here for many more months. We publish a daily paper of one sheet, which is very popular, but some form of contrast is needed to tone up all ranks. Reinforcements would bring new blood and ideas, and training of them would then be undertaken, giving new zest to officers and NCOs. The spirit of the battalion is still good and the defences of its section of Tobruk are as secure as ever. But a calculating outlook has definitely crept in as regards the *joie de vivre*<sup>1</sup> of raiding. I expect this will grow, unless some event takes place to change our outlook.

The following extract from the report of the medical officer of a unit that had just completed a term in the front line gives an objective picture:

The high standard of health which had prevailed since leaving Palestine declined on entering Tobruk, chiefly because of the increasing heat, the difficulty in obtaining adequate quantities of water for washing purposes, and the innumerable flies. Gastroenteritis became very prevalent, and sporadic cases of B. Flexner dysentery occurred.

On the whole, the health of the battalion was still very good, for although diarrhoea was almost universal it rarely incapacitated the patient for more than 24 hours. By 22 June, however, the continued exposure to arduous conditions and the unbearable heat had reduced the resistance of the men in the front line, and the number of men reporting sick had risen considerably. Later, on moving into reserve, the men were able to get adequate rest and sleep, and swimming parties were arranged. The influence of this relaxation was soon noticeable, and general health and resistance rapidly improved.

In the hope that the siege would be raised, little but the barest essentials had been shipped to Tobruk. In May, according to transportation records, 112 tons of fresh meat had been received but there is no record of its consumption (except in hospitals). No fresh meat was received in June. However, the store-ships *Miranda* and *Antiklia* put into Tobruk Harbour on the morning of 1st July, the *Miranda* with 150 tons on board. The arrival of fresh meat at forward units within a few days, in news jargon, "created a sensation". One diarist wrote:

We hadn't tasted any for three months at the very inside. And was it appreciated? We smacked our lips after each mouthful and said: "My, this is delicious". This did much to buck up our spirits.

And another commented: "An issue was made today of one orange per man, the first issue of fresh fruit in Tobruk". In subsequent months the provision of wet rations (fresh meat, vegetables and fruit) greatly improved.

1. *Joie de vivre*: the joy of living. Used here in the sense of the excitement of night patrols; excitement which was tapering off and being replaced by caution.



*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Sunday, 3 August 1941*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Received your ever-welcome letter on Thursday and thanks very much for the paper. We are still short of writing materials, but more so, envelopes. They are our main trouble.

Well, of all the rotten luck. I've just received word I've got to go and find out where the telephone line is broken and I may be away for hours. I suppose it's my job, so I had better go and hope for the best. Sorry, Precious, but I may not get back in time to finish this today...

WELL, DARLING, that's finished and I'm back again. The job wasn't too bad after all. I found the break and repaired it, and as there was a church service on I decided to go. Our padre is quite a decent chap, too. Anyway, while waiting for the service to start an Itie plane flew over pretty low and an AA gun just away from us scored a direct hit and sent him down in flames. The poor Itie didn't have a chance. He went where all good Ities go.

So far, this morning has been quite eventful, because just before church a couple of us were watching the front line through the glasses and we picked up two armoured cars flying white flags. It looked as if a couple of the enemy were surrendering to our chaps up front. I hope it was, but nothing has been verified yet.

Now for the crowning event of the morning. After the service, the mail arrived and I got a letter from you and also one from Mum, and a notice to tell me a parcel has been despatched to me. So it was quite a morning, eh.

There was a fair-size show on our right last night. A couple of battalions went in and captured one of the posts that the Jerrys have held since their big push nearly four months ago. According to the reports we've heard so far, it was a success. Things are looking up round here now, but all the same I hope they take us out of this joint soon.

You would hardly recognize me, Darling. I'm as black as a nigger. All I wear of a day are shorts and I'm as thin as a rake handle. Matter of fact, if they keep us here another two months we'll all disappear into dust. Also, if we got a decent shower of rain we'd either be washed away or else we'd melt. It hasn't rained in this corner of the globe since I've been in it, and that's some little time, eh, Sweet.

A three weeks' spell of dust every day has ended, and for the last two days everything has been clear again. We're not sorry either. I think the dust is the worst curse ever, and if I ever get out of this dump, wild horses themselves won't drag me back again.

Well, Darling, there's been a great deal of amusement caused over here by some mad b--- writing letters home and then having parts of these letters put in *The Women's Weekly*, saying that we're getting well-fed and have plenty of water and fruit and comforts and such things as that. If we were only getting half of what they say, Sweet, we would think ourselves in paradise. The chaps writing such letters must be near the beach, doing nothing except swimming and eating the best of our rations before we get them up in the lines. They've never been in the front line or they wouldn't say damn fool things. Yesterday with half a gallon of water I washed a pair of shorts, shirt, socks, towel and hanky, had a bath and a shave, and cleaned my teeth – and some mug says we got plenty of water. Some people might think we're having a picnic in this dump, but it's far from it, worse luck.

My Darling, you must think I'm in a bad humour today, eh. Well, it feels better to get things off one's chest at times, doesn't it.

Well, Dearest, I'm glad you're a good cook because I'll need a few good meals to fatten me up when I get back as I haven't had one in the last six months. Mostly bully beef stews or tinned bacon. You won't want to put any tinned goods on the table, Sweet, except of course, fruit, because I'll be inclined to chuck you and the tin both out the window. And I know you wouldn't like that.

Precious, as for me being married over here, that's impossible. I haven't seen a member of your sex since landing in this God-forsaken hole. So, my Love, if I stare at you when I get back, don't think there's anything wrong. It will be so strange seeing a girl I won't be able to help myself.

I know, Precious, this is an utterly mad letter all through, but you'll have to be satisfied with it. Being so long in the desert has sent me nuts. Think so, Precious?

By the way, Darling, your watch has stopped. It's got dust in the works. There's only one in 20 watches going here now. They all need an overhaul.

I often think of when we were together, Darling, especially when I've got nothing to do except watch for Huns on a clear moonlit night. We get some beautiful nights here and I always think of you, Sweet, and pray that we'll meet again in this life and fulfill all our dreams.

I'll have to draw this letter to a close as it's getting near our tea time. By the way, I haven't written to your father. Apologise for me, Sweet, as I'm flat out writing to you and Mother every week. Sometimes I've got to scrounge an envelope from somewhere or other. Mum generally sends one with all her letters. Cheerio Darling. All my love and kisses.

*From your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*

P.S. I have too many cobbles to start giving you all their names, Sweet, but these boys – all killed in action – are worth a special mention. They were friends of mine and joined up with me in the same platoon: Lt. Frank Carter, Ptes. Bob Kidd, Jack Tooth and Wally Edwards.

Darling, if I fail to return just remember the lines of this poem and don't take it too hard.

*Yours forever  
NED*

### **AIF FAREWELL**

The city sleeps unscarred by shot or shell  
Our transport moves and sad we say farewell  
Then quietly as wind across the bay  
We sail into the dawn's uncertain grey.

Sleep on beloved, till with returning morn  
You wake to find deserted quays forlorn  
Then shed no tear, but with a joyful pride  
Remember only how our fathers died.

Recall again how once Australia's sons  
Fought on, steadfast, despite the thundering guns  
Then bow before your God and humbly pray  
That we may do such deeds as once did they.

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Tuesday, 12 August 1941*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, sorry I'm a bit late in answering your letter, but time slips away and one doesn't notice it much now. I've finally resigned myself to fate for the duration. There's no change here. Nothing ever happens except a working party every now and then. I'm on one tonight, worse luck.

At the time of writing this, Sweet, I suppose you are enjoying yourself at the Ekka. Have a good time, Darling. I only wish I could be there with you. It would make everything complete, eh.

Well, Dawn, since receiving your last letter I've received some newspapers from you. Thank you very much for sending them. It's great to get a bit of home news, even if it is a bit old.

I'll have to say cheerio, Darling, as the boys are ready to leave for the job.

BACK AGAIN, SWEET HEART, but not for long I'm afraid. We have been working here all day, pick and shovel work, and have to go back again tonight for more. I won't say what I think about it, but you can guess. And I've got a couple of blasted blisters on my hands, which makes it worse.

I wanted to finish this letter tonight and I was going to enclose a letter to your father, but I'll drop him a line sometime this week instead. I hope he'll understand the delay, Sweet, but it couldn't be helped.

Well, Dearest, your letters are arriving all mixed up. I've been getting some dated July before the June lot are all here. So excuse me if I seem to be answering questions the wrong way round, if you get what I mean.

I have to close this soon. I haven't any more news to tell you about. We've got to work again all day tomorrow, worse luck. Cheerio for the present, Darling. Wishing you all the best and good health.

*All my love, Sweetest  
Yours ever, NED*

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Sunday, 24 August 1941*

TO DEAREST DAWN – Well, Darling, it's quite a while now since I've heard from you, but I suppose being back on the farm at Monto is a bit different from working in Brisbane and you won't have so much time on your hands to write.

The last couple of days I've been mucking around with an old Itie machine gun, trying to amuse myself a little and knocking bits of skin off my hands for fun. It seems as if someone else is having a go at it, by the row they're kicking up now.

The Hun has been doing a little bombing lately, but so far hasn't done any damage to note.

I'm still in the same old hole<sup>1</sup>, but it has been getting slightly cooler lately, which is definitely for the better. It will finally get rid of the insects. That will be one curse off our hands at any rate.

Well, Dawn, this is a very disjointed sort of letter I must admit. I just don't seem able to write letters lately. It gets on my goat. I feel like tearing it up and starting another, but I suppose it would only be worse. I've been trying to write this for about an hour so far, Precious, and I have a couple more to write this evening, so I had better hurry up, eh.

How is everyone up Monto way? All okay I hope. Give them my regards, Darling. There's nothing more I can add, so cheerio, Sweet Heart, look after yourself.

*All my love & kisses  
from your's ever  
Loving Fiancee  
Ned*

P.S. I got all my hair cut off again, Sweet, so the war won't want to end just yet, eh.

*Love NED*

1. During the evening of 20 August, 'D' Company moved from the Blue Line to posts R41-49 in the Red Line. See map on p121. Though called "posts" they were actually holes in the ground. See Rommel's description on p156, under *The Conquest of Tobruk*.

**Lines Written in a Dugout**

(By Lt. A.G. Austin, Victoria)

In my cave lives a solitary rat  
(A celibate rat I can vouch for that)  
He hasn't a mate for miles around  
And he lives on what he finds on the ground  
Though the country's such that that's not much.  
I don't like he  
And he can't stand me  
But we need the roof, so there we be.

In my cave lives a type of flea,  
(A scurrilous flea believe you me)  
And though he's such a tiny thing  
His bite is worse than a scorpion's sting.  
He lives on rat, but worse than that  
He lives on me  
This scurrilous flea  
With all his numerous progeny.

Near my cave lives the octave bird  
(The queerest bird you've ever heard)  
He sings eight notes as he climbs the scale  
Though the topmost note is known to fail.  
He's very small, just like us all.  
So in we fit  
Though we're cramped a bit  
Old rat and flea, and bird and me.



*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Monday, 1 September 1941*

TO MY MOST PRECIOUS SWEET HEART – Thanks ever so much for your letter, Darling. I thought you must have forgotten me in the excitement of getting ready to go home to Monto. I hope you are getting on okay back there. No more rows over me? Maybe your father thinks I'm the little white-haired boy who's gone over to do his bit, eh. Poor mug me. Does he ever throw anything up about the past, Sweet, or has he really changed his mind? Let me know, Darling, please.

By the way, you had better not show your father this letter or I'll be getting shot when I get back, and I would hate that to happen after dodging everything the Hun slings round over here. It would be a calamity.

Well, Darling, the Hun sent over a mob of planes this morning and dropped a lot of bombs, mostly at random. He's not game to do much dive bombing now, so he's never very successful.

I got the Itie machine gun going again and have been praying to get a shot at some planes, but nothing will come within reach, damn their souls.

I'm still in the same old dump and plodding along as usual, hoping we'll soon be able to get a bit of leave. There's a dust storm on this evening, though it's not too bad up this part, luckily.

Well, Darling, I'll have to leave this for a while as I've got work to do.

THAT'S OVER, and I'm again on the job at hand, Darling. You want to know if I think of you often. Well, Precious, I'm always thinking of you, especially when things are not too pleasant here. Darling, I miss you just as much as you miss me – more so, if that's possible. There's one thing we can do a lot of here, Sweet, and that is think. Of a night when on sentry duty, all you do is watch and think of the past, present and future. Very little of the present though. Mostly of the future and pleasant memories of the past. It helps to keep one sane in this place.

Thanks for the papers you sent, Dawn. I received another bundle a couple of days ago. Thanks also for the stamped envelopes and writing paper, and also for the dig about my "sense of duty" letter<sup>1</sup>.

I'm sorry, Precious, but one can't put personal details in a letter that's going to be censored. Would you like me to? I don't think you would. You have it over me there, because your letters are not censored and you can write anything you like. We only get a green envelope once in a blue moon, so you will have to be satisfied with that, Dearest. You understand, don't you, Sweet?

Clive must have "ideas" by what you say, Sweet, but he's not as good as he thinks, is he<sup>2</sup>.

Well, Darling, there's no more news to add. Give them all my regards please, Sweet. I'll be seeing them all soon, I hope. Cheerio, Precious.

*Lots of love and kisses  
from yours ever truly  
NED*

P.S. As soon as I see the Pay Sergeant I'm sending you £10 to do with what you want. Also, I'm sending £20 to Mother and making an allotment to her. It will help things along a bit.

NED

1. Ned is probably referring to his letter of 25/7/1941 in which he tells Dawn that he has six or seven letters to write and that "it would be a relief to have them all written".

2. See first paragraph of Clive's letter to Dawn, 25/8/1941, p163.

#### WHAT TO SEND TO TOBRUK

If you want to help the boys at Tobruk, send them:

**As many bright letters as possible.**

**Newspaper clippings (which arrive faster than newspapers).**

**Small parcels (which go more quickly than big ones), using newspaper for the internal wrappings.**

**Frequent small canteen orders (not more than 2/- at a time).**

**Tea, cocoa and chocolate.**

That was the advice given in Melbourne last week by the Rev. H.L. Hawkins, a Y.M.C.A. representative with the A.I.F. who has returned from Libya.

The use of newspapers for internal wrappings, he said, would give the troops additional home news.

"Conditions in Tobruk are appalling," he said. "Dust, flies, heat, fleas, sand that gets into everything, not much water to wash in, and continuous dive-bombing make it an uncomfortable spot, but the boys are wonderfully bright. They are so busy backing each other up that they always find something to amuse them."

It was always noisy at Tobruk with some form of warfare, and although Tobruk was such a landmark standing out clearly in the desert, bombing did not do much harm. Most of the bombs missed their mark and the boys had become expert at dodging them.

*North Queensland Register: 18 Oct 1941*



Above: Letter 27 from overseas, received by Dawn 26 September.





you once again. I'm sorry about the lapse of time between my last letter and this one, but I've been waiting to hear from you, Sweet.

Well, Dearest, everything's going on the same as usual here. We go out digging every day, and now and again one of us gets a day off. Luckily it's my turn today, so I've taken the opportunity to have a clean up and catch up with my mail. I haven't heard from home, not since the letter you sent with one of Mother's enclosed, so I'm wondering just what is going on.

Well, Precious, there's nothing of interest to tell you about this dump. It's all been told before. There's a concert on here tomorrow night, so I'm going. Things are looking up, eh.

Darling, the day I get out of here will be a very happy one and I think I'll celebrate by buying a big headache<sup>1</sup>. It certainly will be a relief. But the happiest day, Darling, will be the day I step off the train and see you and Mother. That will be the day, eh.

Precious, I don't want you to worry about me. I can look after myself. After all, they do say the Bad Penny will always turn up – and there's a few back home that call me that, isn't there. Even you have thought it at times. I know, to my sorrow.

So you didn't think the Ekka was so hot, and only the military parade was any good. I got another letter saying the same thing, and they said they would tell me all about the military parade when I come back. Very nice, don't you think? A civvie telling me about a military parade. Anyway, we got a laugh out of it.

Precious, this will have to do for today. It's not much, I know, but it's my best at present. Give my regards to all up there, Darling.

*Lots of love and kisses  
from your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*

P.S. By the way, Precious, I'll enclose a letter to Mother in yours as I've only got the one envelope. Tell her not to worry if she doesn't get many letters from me in the usual way. Give them my love at home, Sweet Heart. Cheerio.

NED

1. Get drunk.

*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Saturday, 20 September 1941*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, I received your very welcome letter last Wednesday and was glad to hear you are getting along okay. Things over here are just the same as usual. The last two days have been darn miserable on account of a fairly bad sandstorm. Thank God we don't have to suffer too many of them now. I suppose our next trouble, if we're still here, will be the wet season, worse luck. Anyway, here's hoping for the best.

Well, Darling, I got a devil of a surprise a couple of days ago. I was informed that I had been promoted to Lance Corporal. The surprise part was that I didn't even know I had been recommended for a stripe, so it really took the wind right out of my sails.

Dearest, I'm afraid this letter is going to be very short as I can't think of anything else to say. I received a letter from Mother last night, but you would already know all the news from there. I haven't heard from anyone else for quite a while. I suppose I'll get a stack of mail from them all at the one time, worse luck.

That piece in your letter about sending a copy of my letter to the paper – well, lay off, Sweet. I don't want my name put in any old mag. Let them write what they like about the conditions over here, but leave me out of it. It won't make any difference anyway.

Cheerio, Sweet Heart. Lots of luck and the best of health to you.

*From your ever-truly fiancé  
NED*



Above: Ned's stripe



## ***Sweet Heart, if I don't return from this war...***

*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Friday, 26 September 1941*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – So glad to receive your ever-welcome letter last night and to know you are still okay, even if feeling a bit down in the dumps, Precious.

Well, Sweet Heart, I've managed to get a green envelope at last, so I guess I can let my head go, eh. That is if I'm not disturbed. I hope not, but the boys have been playing cards in my doover and I suppose they'll be back again soon.

A few of the boys have received parcels this afternoon and everyone's out seeing just what's what.

You mentioned Clem Goodwin in your last letter, so I asked around. It turned out he's camped only a mile away, so I took a stroll over and saw him this morning. He didn't recognize me at first. Said that I had changed a lot since he saw me last.

Darling, everything here is very quiet at present. Too quiet by far for my peace of mind. We're still out of the front line, Sweet, but I suppose we'll be back up before long.

The weather here has been very miserable the last week or so. The change started off with a sandstorm, lasted two days, and then when it was finished it turned cold and small showers of rain have been falling nearly every day since. It looks as if the wet season is starting before we leave here. I've been hoping and praying we would soon get away, and now things look just as bad as ever. Well, not quite as bad as they were, but we won't be leaving till you get this letter, at least by what one hears.

Well, my precious Love, a few of us walked down to the beach today and had a swim. It was damnable cold, but after walking 3 miles to get there we just had to have a dip. Every time I go to the beach, Darling, it seems to remind me of you and how far away you are now.

SWEET HEART, this is now Saturday 27th. My letter writing was interrupted last night, and as we moved to another position this morning I couldn't finish. Neither will I be able to finish it this afternoon as it's late now, worse luck.

Well, Darling, I must apologise for something I said I'd do and haven't done so far. I hope you'll forgive me, Sweet. The thing is I haven't sent the £10 yet. I tried to a couple of times, but the Pay Sergeant didn't have the necessary papers with him so I've had to wait. I'll send it along as soon as I can. Buy yourself a better engagement ring with the money, Sweet, if you like. Don't put it in the bank. There's really no need to.

29.9.1941 – Hello, Darling. I'm back on the job again and with hopes of finishing this time. I'm afraid there's not much to say, Sweet, except to say how much I love you, eh, Darling.

That photo of me was taken a couple of days after getting off the boat when we first arrived. Since then I've put in seven months in the Libyan Desert – to my sorrow. It does make a bit of difference, you know, and more than likely I'll have changed a fair bit before you see me again. But I'll always love you, don't you worry. Anyway, Dearest, there's little chance of me falling in love with someone else, because it's over six months since I've seen a girl of any description. We'll be wondering what they are when we get out of this dump.

I'll save the first kiss for you when I do return to Aussie, and all the rest that follow, too, if you wish. Is that the promise you want, Darling? Because, if so, I'll promise that, Dawn my Love.

Darling, do you ever regret not giving in to me – not doing what I wanted you to do – when I was up there at Mulgeldie? Do you Sweet Heart?

Well, Darling, I think I've told you everything I can about them giving me a stripe. I didn't really want it or I would have done my best before now. I thought the job I had was good enough. It was, too, but they thought I could do better with a stripe.

Sweet Heart, if I don't return from this war I don't want you to mourn for me. If I've got to die, it's better to do it here than to have stayed back there and lived. Just carry on and enjoy yourself. Life is short enough without being sorry for someone who has gone ahead.

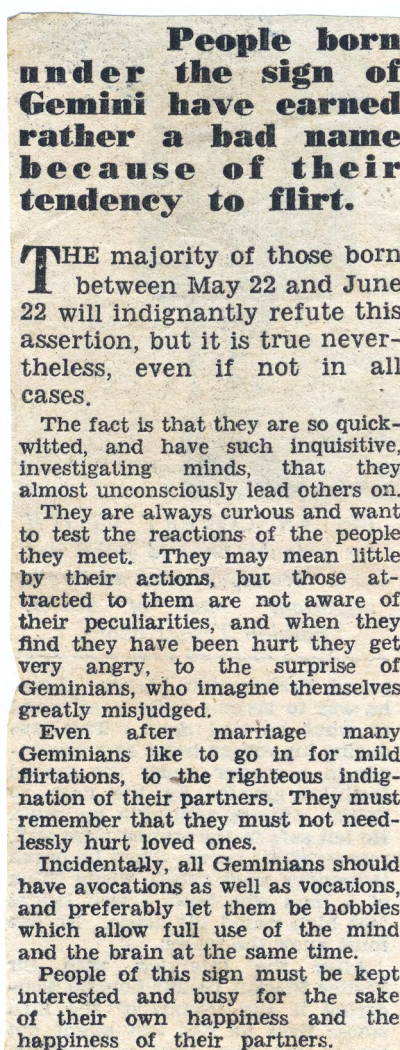
Well, Precious, there's a dust storm blowing up and I've got to pack my gear for another move, damn it.

By the way, Sweet, I'm enclosing a cutting out of the *Women's Weekly*. Do you think it applies to me? If it does, I had better be careful. After we're married you might chase me with a rolling pin. Anyway, Precious, I don't think I'm as bad as that, do you?

By the way, Darling, have you still got your freckles, or as you call them, beauty spots? And can't you send a few more snaps now and again, Dearest? I would like to get some. Send me one of you in bathing togs, or are you too shy?

Give my regards to all up there. I love you Dawn with all my heart. I hope you still love me the same. Cheerio, my precious Sweet Heart.

*All my love and kisses  
from your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*



Above: The cutting from the *Women's Weekly* referred to by Ned and enclosed with the above letter.

***I never ever thought I'd be in a place  
where I wouldn't see a woman  
for eight months***

*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Monday, 6 October 1941*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, just a note to let you know I'm still in the land of the living and doing okay. I haven't heard from you for about a fortnight. Our mail must be held up somewhere or other. I suppose I'll get a letter sometime during this week.

Things over here are just the same as ever. Nothing changes. The same dreary existence with not much to look forward to except going back to Aus. And that looks as far off as ever.

Well, Sweet Heart, Christmas is nearly here again. Only 11 weeks more and it will be exactly 12 months since I've seen you.

Precious, I've done a lot of things I never dreamed of doing, and created a few records for myself in not doing certain things that I've always done in the past. I never ever thought I'd be in a place where I wouldn't see a woman for eight months. That's something I never dreamed of.

Darling, I haven't any more news here so I'll close. Wishing you all the best in the world and all my love and kisses.

*From your truly ever-loving fiancé  
NED*

P.S. The artillery are having a bit of a duel at present and making a hell of a row.

*Lots of love  
NED*

*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Wednesday, 15 October 1941*

To My Darling FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, the mail arrived the night before last and I was quite pleased to receive two letters from you. I collected eight letters in all and it was great to lie back and read them after not getting any for a couple of weeks. Mother sent me a couple of photos, one of Clive and one of myself. Also got a letter from Kath, Keith's wife, and she sent a few snaps of Keith and also of Mother and you at Wynnum. I never expected a letter from Kath and it was quite a surprise to hear from her.

Well, Darling, everything's much the same here as ever, except it looks very much like rain at present and there's a darn cold snap on. There was a rotten dust storm a couple of days ago, so you can judge just what we think of this place. I'm still in the same old hole, but we have hopes. I have to close this for tonight, Sweet Heart, as it's getting too dark to write.

*Love NED*

WELL, DAWN, I'm back again and still haven't much news to write about. Maybe I'll have something to tell you about in the not too distant future. I'm hoping so, anyway.

We have been informed that we are in the 9th Division now<sup>1</sup>, Darling, so I've been busy this morning cutting my colour patches and sewing them on again. It was a bit of a nuisance, but it helped to put in the morning.

Darling, go to dances by all means if you want to, and enjoy yourself. Go, Sweet, but please keep true. Live in hope of the future, like we do here. And don't worry – this stunt won't last forever.

Mother said in her last letter that Marj wants you to go to her at Biloela if things don't go too well at home with your father. I received a letter from him the other night and he mentioned a few things about you and what a problem you were to him. He seems to want me to write to you and tell you to behave yourself. He still seems to have the same opinion of me. I can't understand him at all.

By the way, you didn't mention about having a buster off one of the horses. I can see I'll have to hurry up and get back there to look after you, eh, my Sweet.

I think I'll have to close this, Darling, as I've got nothing else to say. Cheerio, Precious. All my love and kisses. I wish you the best of everything.

*From yours ever truly  
NED*

P.S. Look after yourself, Darling, and never mind trying to find out how hard the ground is.

*Lots of love  
NED*

1. Ned's assertion that "we are in the 9th Division now" comes eight months too late. The AIF in the Middle East was reorganised on 26 February, resulting in Ned's battalion being transferred from the 7th Division to the 9th Division.

Why he thought he was still in the 7th Division is unclear. One explanation might be that his battalion had retained the colour patch of the 7th Division, and only in October were the men required to change to the 9th Division's colour patch.



QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
 Monday, 20 October 1941

TO MY DARLING DAWN – Well, Precious, this is just a short note to let you know I'm still okay and thinking of you. I hope things are the same with you back there, Dearest. You'll have to excuse this letter, Dawn, as I'm writing it by a small oil light, one we've made ourselves, and it's not the brightest. I'm writing this tonight so as to catch the mail tomorrow. I'm on a patrol tonight and I'll be feeling more like sleeping than writing in the morning.

I received another letter from you a couple of nights ago, Darling. So you're going to try and join the WAAF, eh? Well, here's the best of luck, Sweet Heart, and may you like it if you are accepted.

Well, Dearest, things are very quiet here at present. Nothing doing at all. I'll say cheerio, Sweet, till tomorrow when I'll finish this.

*All my love and kisses*  
 NED

WELL, DARLING, it was very quiet out last night. Nothing doing except a few Hun machine guns stuttering away. That's his usual show.

I received a letter from your father a week or so ago, and I think I told you about it. He thought I didn't ask for your hand properly, Sweet. Did he expect me to go up to Monto and ask him personally? I sent him two letters and he ignored my questions in both. If he still feels that way after I get back I won't bother to ask him again – if you're willing. Anyway, I'm not back yet, Sweet, so we won't worry, eh.

There's no more news to tell you, and I have to write to Mother yet so I'll close this. Wishing you everything of the best, Darling, and all my love.

*From yours ever truly*  
 NED

P.S. No need to put any envelopes or writing paper in your letters now, Darling, as I've got plenty. Cheerio till next letter.

NED



not the least idea.

## TOBRUK SIEGE RECORD

(From Lieut. Roy Macartney)

On October 10, the Australians in Tobruk completed six months of active operations in the defence of the fortress. This is the longest period any garrison has withstood siege during this war.

It was spring when the siege commenced on April 10, 1941, and the enemy were still sweeping on into Egypt. However, the nights were becoming increasingly colder and the chill of the Western Desert winter was in the air when I returned from Tobruk a few days ago after five weeks within the perimeter and the front lines.

In retrospect, the value of the defence of Tobruk cannot be assessed too highly. It was the rallying point for Commonwealth forces during the March retirement and the presence of the garrison astride the German's long lines of communication contributed materially in putting a halt to their advance early in the siege.

During the April and May attacks the Germans lost heavily in tanks and men when the garrison showed how panzer units could be repelled by resolute men making efficient use of antitank mines and artillery.

For six months this valuable port has been denied the enemy. During this period more than 20,000 Germans and Italians have been needed to encircle the defences and these men have had to be supplied and provisioned through the already congested ports of Tripoli and Benghazi. For six months Tobruk has been a key point in the Western Desert defence.

The defenders have endured days, weeks, and months of ceaseless fighting from spring to winter; bombing, shelling, patrolling, attack and counterattack; ceaseless vigil under relentless sun and biting dust; dangerous reconnaissance and occupation duties; and night scouting and fighting through the most trying conditions of a vicious Libyan summer. They are six months of which Australia may be truly proud.

North Queensland Register, 25 Oct 1941

Left: Letter 33 from overseas. Postmarked 22 October, received by Dawn 8 November.

# White Crosses

## THE END OF THE SIEGE



THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK lasted for almost eight months. Rommel abandoned the siege on 7 December 1941 after the British Eighth Army launched Operation Crusader under the command of General Auchinleck, whose orders to his subordinate commander during the operation included the sentence: “There is only one order: attack and pursue”.

Operation Crusader began on 18 November. Despite some initial success against the British, Rommel was compelled to withdraw his army to Gazala, west of Tobruk, and then all the way back to El Agheila. Auchinleck’s aggressiveness had removed the threat to Egypt and the Suez Canal for the time being. However, on 21 June of the next year Rommel began a second offensive that finally captured the fortress.

Rommel’s retreat from Tobruk in December 1941 was the first victory over the Germans by British-led forces during the war and was a good example of the “game of tig” fighting which plagued the North Africa campaign.

The decision by Rommel on 7 December to abandon Tobruk marks an important date in history. But the next morning it was eclipsed by events in the Pacific – Japan attacked Pearl Harbour. By that one stroke Britain acquired a new ally with common ideals, America, and its ultimate victory became assured.

NED’S BATTALION did not remain at Tobruk for the entire duration of the siege. Part of the 2/15th were evacuated to Palestine in a naval convoy on the night of 25 October during the moonless period, but due to lack of transport, ‘C’ and ‘D’ companies had to wait until the next moonless period a month away. Ned arrived in Palestine on 17 November 1941.

It was not until July of the following year that Australian ground forces again took part in the desert campaign, by which time Tobruk had fallen. In the intervening months the 9th Division was stationed in Palestine and Syria, and was not actively involved in the war.

IN THE DEFENCE of Tobruk, 941 Australians were taken prisoner and 832 lost their lives. Dave Wotherspoon, a member of Ned’s battalion, wrote the following lines in tribute to the dead.

On the day before leave taking, from the place called Tobruk Bay

One last visit I’ll be making, to the grave yard down the way

Where 800 small white crosses, and 800 sacred mounds

Show where our Australian losses, sleep their last on foreign grounds.

Every white cross tells a story, with a number, rank and name

Every mound is one of glory, for it holds an Anzac’s frame

Each fair state a space divided, in this square of Libyan sand

And undoubtedly decided, fairest square in all the land.

Every mound holds someone’s Digger, every cross some mother’s pride,

And Australia’s fame grows bigger, for the way those heroes died

“Best of mates, ’tis hard to leave you, in this sandy waste so bare

But fond hearts shall ne’er forget you, in your native land so fair.

We know not our destination, when we leave this hostile bay

But we’ve this determination, we shall square the cost some day

And perhaps it sounds like ‘hooley’, but the orders read ‘No Noise!’

Or I’d sound one last loud ‘coooo’, as a farewell from the boys.”



### White Crosses.

On the day before leave taking, From the place called Tobruk Bay,  
One last visit I'll be making, To the grave yard down the way  
Where 600 small white crosses, + 800 Sacred mounds  
Show where our Australian losses, Sleep this last on Foreign Grounds

Every white ~~cross~~ <sup>cross</sup> tells a story, With a do. Rank + Name  
Every mound is one of Glory. For it holds an Angel's Frame  
Each fair state a space divided, In this square of Libyan Sand  
And undoubtedly decided, fairest square in all the Land.

Every mound holds some one's Wigger, Every Cross some Mother's Pride,  
And Australia's fame grows bigger, For the way those Heroes Died  
"Best of mates, 'tis hard to leave you, In this sandy waste so bare  
But fond hearts shall not forget you, In your native land so fair

We know not our destination, When we leave this hostile Bay  
But we've this determination, We shall square the cost some day  
And perhaps it sounds like "hooray", But the Orders read "No Noise"  
Or I'd sound one last loud "Loose", As a Farewell from  
the boys".

Above: The poem *White Crosses* in Dawn's handwriting.  
Dawn copied it to send to Ned's mother,  
but Ned's original has not survived.  
[Dawn, DF03, 1941]



QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
 Tuesday, 18 November 1941

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Well, Darling, it's quite some time since my last letter, but owing to circumstances it was impossible to send any mail.

Anyway, Sweet, I've got some good news – I'm back in Palestine and in the best of health. A little tired after the trip, but it was worth getting tired for, eh. It's great to be back in a camp again, Darling, and to see a bit of green. It's really a sight for sore eyes.

I've just received eight letters. Five or six from you, Darling, and I just can't think straight. I'll write a letter as soon as I get used to being here and settled down a bit.

How is everything going back in Aussie? Everything okay up Monto way? Give them all my regards, Darling, and wish them all a merry Christmas for me, please.

Well, Dearest, I've got to send a letter to Mother next, and I can't think of much news just at the moment as I'm being interrupted too often. We haven't settled in yet, so I'll close this. Cheerio. All my love to you, Precious.

*From yours ever truly*  
 NED

P.S. I'm sending a couple of cables this afternoon to you and Mother.

*Love NED*





*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Tuesday, 25 November 1941*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Darling, I'm back to the business of writing again and I suppose you think it's about time, too, eh. I can only say I'm sorry, Sweet, but everything seemed so mixed up that if I had written any letters they wouldn't have made sense. Don't be surprised if this one doesn't either.

Well, Precious, I've got six of your letters to answer and about 25 others too, so I'm in for a busy time ahead, eh. It's not the best when you receive no mail for a month and then get it all in a heap. It seems such a lot to answer, doesn't it, but if one doesn't write answers then one doesn't get any letters and that would be worse still.

I've been back in Palestine a week now and have had two days' leave in Tel Aviv. Didn't see much of the place, though we enjoyed ourselves no end. There's plenty of beer, so you can guess what we did. Nothing to be ashamed of though, Darling, I assure you. Tel Aviv is rather a nice town situated on the sea, clean and also fair size. It was great to get around and not worry about anything and to sleep in a decent bed. We thought so anyway. I'm on security guard at present and just waiting for more leave to come along. I'll have a good look around next time and see the sights if I can, and also take a few snaps, too.

Darling, you want me to write to your father about what you suggested in one of your letters. No, Precious, I won't do that. Just think, Dawn, and maybe you will understand. What if I came back crippled for life? It wouldn't be fair to you or anyone else, would it. I think I know the answer you'll give to that, but it doesn't alter the matter at all. Forget it, Sweet, and we'll see how things turn out, okay?

I'm glad you enjoyed yourself at the ball. It will do you good to go about and enjoy yourself instead of worrying about me. I can look after myself. I don't remember Ike Mathers, but it certainly was good of him to take you. Tell him thanks from me, Sweet.

I suppose you hear all about the scrap<sup>1</sup> going on in Libya now, Sweet. We just got out before it started, and in a way I wish I was still there to see how it goes. Maybe if I was there I'd wish I wasn't, so who knows, eh.

Well, Sweet, I'm going to send a few snaps over in the near future, so I hope you get them okay. I might send a photo that was taken in Tel Aviv on leave, two pals and myself. It will give you an idea of how we spent our leave. Sitting at tables was about all we did.

Darling, I think I'll draw this to a close. There's a lot more I could add, I suppose, but I can't seem to put it into sentences today.

Give my regards to all up there, and wish them all a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Cheerio, my Darling. All my love.

*From your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*

## DECEMBER 1941

Edited extracts, *Let Enemies Beware*: 102-103

FOR THE 2/15TH BATTALION, the month of December opened with a visit from the ABC Field Unit. Recordings were made of 180 soldiers of the battalion. Men visited the camp cinema to record a message that would be broadcast to their loved ones at Christmas<sup>2</sup>.

The battalion spent all of December 1941 in elementary training and numerous route marches, plus some security patrols. The proximity to many towns and cities of the Holy Land provided fascinating leave opportunities, and many of the officers and men visited exotic places such as Cairo and Tel Aviv. The major impediment to going on leave to cities was that soldiers had to have a minimum of £20 in their pay books, a requirement which automatically ruled out a significant number of men going on such leave.



**Above:** Sphinx, Egypt  
[Ned, NF73, 1941]

**Opposite:** Lance Corporal Ned, centre, with his one stripe, on leave in Tel Aviv. Captain Tom Doyle is on the left; the other man is unidentified.  
[Joy Burns, J46, 1941]

1. The "scrap" Ned refers to was Operation Crusader.  
See *End of the Siege*, p140.

2. Ned mentions the recording in his letter dated 2/12/1941.

*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Tuesday, 2 December 1941*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, I received your very loving letter two or three days ago and was very pleased to hear from you. This is just a note to let you know I'm still kicking and thinking of you, Sweet. There's nothing startling happening round here, but it's fairly cold and has been raining during the week making things very miserable at times.

Well, Dearest, here's a bit of news for you. I sent you and Mum a cheerio call yesterday. It's a recording and it will be sent over the air before Christmas, or so they told us. So if you listen in to the wireless when they're being broadcast you'll hear my voice. A very nervous one no doubt, but what odds. I think I would rather go on a fighting patrol than talk over the mike. It seems so darn silly. Here's hoping you hear it, anyway, and that this letter gets over in time.

Darling, I'll be sending the cash as soon as I see the Pay Sarge. I'm going back to my company tomorrow, so I'll be seeing him in the next couple of days. I'll send it to Mulgeldie.

Darling, there's not much to tell you about. You get all the news about the Libyan scrap, more than we get, and anyway, I think it will be over before you get this. Russia seems to be giving them a hiding too, so here's hoping it won't be long before we're together again, Love.

Cheerio, Sweet Heart. All my love and kisses.

*From yours ever truly  
NED*

*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Thursday, 11 December 1941*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Received your ever-welcome letter yesterday, also a Christmas card from Evelyn. Give them my thanks please, Darling. I sent a few Christmas cards, but I doubt if they will get there in time as I left it a little late to send them. Here's hoping for the best anyway.

I also received a letter from Mother today. I was very pleased to hear from both of you as it has been a while since I received your last one. I haven't received many at all since the stack I got when we arrived.

The news from over here is pretty good lately. It certainly was a surprise to hear Japan had declared war. Everything seems in a mess over that way at present, but by the time you receive this I suppose it will be all straightened out. I only wish I was in Malaya now to have a slap at the Japs. All the boys are of the same mind. If it was a case of going where one liked there wouldn't be an Aussie left here. Anyway, America ought to be able to handle the situation, eh.

There's been a bit of sickness going about lately. Mainly flu and fever. I was out of action for a couple of days last week with fever and it wasn't too good, either.

I was sorry to hear about your father, Darling. I hope he's better. I suppose it puts a lot of work on your shoulders. But cheer up, Sweet. It shouldn't be any longer than a year before this scrap is done and then think of all the fun you and I'll have, eh.

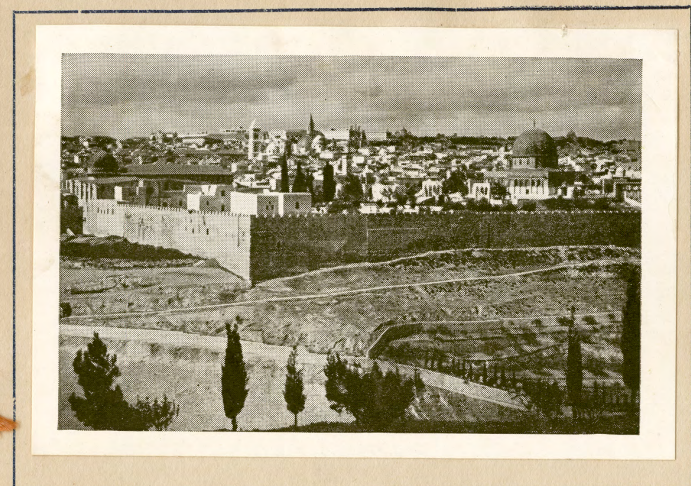
By the way, Dear, did you hear that recording or haven't they put it over yet? Let's know if it goes over, as I would like to know how it sounded – damn silly, I suppose.

Well, Darling, Christmas will be gone by the time you get this. I hope you enjoyed it. If not, we'll see what the next one brings, eh.

Mother was saying in her letter that Marj, Max and the nips were all down in Brisbane for a day or so. I was just wondering if they called in to see you, but maybe they didn't go through Monto. Let me know, Sweet Heart, if they did.

Give my regards to your mother, Dearest, and to anyone else up that way. Cheerio, Sweet Heart. All my loves and kisses to you.

*From your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*



JERUSALEM - The Wall of the Holy City



QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Monday, 22 December 1941

TO MY DARLING DAWN – Well, Precious, I received your very welcome letter a couple of days ago and was very pleased to hear from you and to know you are okay. I also received your parcel a while back and it was great. Thanks ever so much for sending it, Darling. It was worth waiting for. There's nothing much going on at present, except today is one of the worst days we've had to suffer since landing here. It's raining – and as cold as ice – with a nice strong breeze blowing. You can guess how miserable we feel.

I started this letter yesterday, Darling, and the weather is just the same – if not worse – as it was then. I'm in bed writing this, Sweet, so please excuse the writing if it gets too awful. I got wet this morning, so now I'm making sure of keeping warm. I'm going on duty tonight and I'm hoping the rain will stop. I hate the idea of getting wet twice in one day in this damn place.

Well, precious Sweet Heart, I'm going on leave tomorrow for two days, so I'll be spending Christmas Day out of camp trying to enjoy myself in Tel Aviv. Four days' leave in 12 months is not a bad record, eh Darling, but we'll make up for it when I return, won't we, just you and I.

It must be tough on you, Dawn, having no one to help you on the farm. I hope it will soon be all right again. Everything seems in a muddle now, but let's hope it won't be for too long. We'll do our best and try and carry on till better days come, eh Darling.

Thanks very much for your Christmas card, Sweet. It was very nice and I wish you have the same good time, too, Dear.



You mention in your last letter, Sweet Heart, that I never say anything about myself. Well, Love, there's nothing to tell. I'm just the same as ever, even if I do feel a bit older. And I love you just as much as I used to, if not more – if that's possible. But I'm not much of a hand at putting my feelings on paper, Sweet. It always seems to get mixed up. So you'll excuse me, Dearest, won't you?

By the way, Darling, I've finally sent you that £10 I promised. I hope you get it soon.

Well, my Love, I have to write to Mother before I mount duty, so I'll close. Please give my regards to all up there and thank Evelyn and your mother for their Christmas greetings.

Darling, I hope you can manage to get up to Marj's. It would do you good, I think. She'll feed you well, so don't lose that lovely figure, will you.

Have you heard that cheerio message yet, Sweet? It was to be broadcast before Christmas, or so they tell us. Cheerio, my Love. All my love and kisses.

From your ever-loving fiancé  
NED

P.S. I'll try and scrounge a green envelope one of these days, Sweet, if possible. Keep your chin up, Sweet Heart, and don't work too hard or worry too much. I'm trusting you, Dearest.

Love NED



Precious,  
  you want to know if I've been drunk over here  
    and if I've started gambling.

Well, Darling,  
  as far as beer goes,  
    I suppose I've done my share of drinking.  
  A half dozen of us often have a party when we are out of the line.  
But as for gambling,  
  no, I haven't started that yet, nor am I likely to.  
As for being too old when I get home for what you mentioned,  
  Sweetest, I hardly think so.  
And as for getting married –  
  well, Dawn, I'd like to as soon as I get back,  
  if you think the same of me as I do of you.

I know everything has not turned out the best so far with us,  
  but it'll be a different tale when I return.  
There'll be no need to be frightened of me, Sweet.  
I'm not tough and rough yet,  
  even if I look and act like it here.  
I'm still the same old Ned you used to know,  
  only with a lot more sense attached  
    and a bit of understanding, too.

To be truthful,  
  I don't think so much of myself  
  or think I'm the only one that matters.



## ***Letters 1942***

**JANUARY 1942**

Edited extracts, *Let Enemies Beware*: 106-110

THE NEW YEAR opened with miserable weather, but the prospect of a move to Syria on frontier garrison duty generated considerable interest within the 2/15th Battalion. The move to Syria began at 6.30 a.m. on 13 January, first by truck and then by train. On the 16th, 'D' company settled into barracks at Aleppo<sup>1</sup>; the other companies of the 2/15 were stationed at Idlib. Life in the barracks provided a form of forgotten luxury for the men – there was hot water and even civilians to talk to.

Weather conditions in Syria were in stark contrast to conditions in Queensland. The weather was very cold. The water was usually capped with a layer of ice and on 27 January snow fell.

1. See map, page 153.

**Below:** Eight Australians on the first day of the siege of Tobruk, after fleeing before Rommel in the Benghazi Handicap. Ned is second from right, standing. He sent this photo with his letter of 20/1/1942: "I'm going to send you a snap, Dearest. One that was taken in the desert after the derby. Don't blame us if we look a bit queer as it wasn't our fault."

Caption on back of photo: *To Dawn. It's not very pretty, is it, but it does look like we did at the time. Lots of love, Ned.*

[Dawn, DF04, 10 April 1941]

*To Dawn  
It's not very pretty, is it  
but it does look like  
we did at the time.  
Lots of love  
Ned*





*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
 Sunday, 4 January 1942*

TO MY DEAREST DAWN – Well, Precious, I'm afraid you will have to excuse me for not writing before this. It's been very miserable here for the last week or so and I haven't felt at all like writing to anyone. It's been raining on and off for quite a while now and is very cold as well. Matter of fact, it's colder than anywhere I've been to before in my life. We haven't seen a decent winter for the last two years, so you can guess how we feel it now.

Well, Darling, Christmas and New Year are over for another 12 months, eh. Let's hope we'll be able to spend it together next time, and I think with a bit of luck we will.

It's been a pretty rotten Christmas here. Nothing much to do but sit and think – or drink beer if you could get it, which generally you couldn't – and it was the same again at New Year. I spent Christmas Day in Tel Aviv, but it rained all day and completely spoilt our leave.

It's been blowing rather a gale here lately. A cold one at that, too, and blowing a few tents down here and there. You never know when you will wake up with the tent gone and everything soaked, including yourself. But that's enough about this rotten place, this land of milk and honey as it's called.

How are you getting on back there, Sweet Heart? Still working hard, or are things easier now? Give my love to Jean, Sweet, and tell her I'll pick the sister I like best when I get back – you, Darling.

I haven't received any mail here for a while now, Dear. I guess the Japs have altered the service a bit, but as long as I know you are okay I'm satisfied with very few letters.

Well, Sweet Heart, I've been doing my best to get a green envelope for the last six weeks, but they seem very scarce so I can't put all I would like to into these letters. I hope you understand, Darling.

I must say your last letter, or card, was short and sweet. Was that to pay me back for the rotten ones I've written? I think I've already thanked you for your parcel, Sweet. It was great. And thanks also for the one that's coming. I hope it arrives soon, as we could do with another good party.

Well, Precious, I'm glad you are going out and enjoying yourself. I can see you'll have to teach me to dance again when I get back. I haven't been to a dance for about two years now, not since I've joined the AIF. Quite a while ago now, isn't it. Here's hoping it's not for much longer.

Darling, there's nothing else of interest I can tell you except how much I love you and how much I miss you. But that can't be put on paper, it's too big a job for me. So, Darling, I'll say cheerio. All the best to you, my Precious, and lots of love and kisses.

*From your ever-loving fiancé  
 NED*

P.S. Please excuse the scribble, Sweet, but it's so damn cold here. And thanks ever so much for the snap of you. It's a sight for sore eyes. Thanks Dearest.

*Love NED*

*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
 'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf Bn, AIF Abroad  
 Tuesday, 20 January 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, I must apologise for not writing to you before this, but there have been a few changes since I last wrote to you, and also I haven't heard from you since Christmas. I know it's not your fault, Sweet, as everything's a bit topsy-turvy just at present.

Darling, I guess this will surprise you a little. I'm in Syria now. It's rather a nice place too, but a little too cold for my liking, and also a little wet, to my sorrow. There's hardly been a sunny day since I've been here.

I'm on duty trying to write this, so I haven't got too far advanced, and now it's nearly time for me to set up for bed and get warm for a change. So I'll say good night, Sweet. Cheerio.

WELL, SWEET HEART, I'm back again to finish this I hope, though there's not much news to mention. I've been through a few towns in Syria such as Beirut, Tripoli and Aleppo. They are rather old towns and as I saw them only at night I can't tell you anything of interest about them. I'm hoping to get day leave sometime, so as to see a few of the sights about here.

Well, Precious, I received a few letters on the 18th. One from Marj and Mother each, and also one from Betty. I was very pleased to hear from them as it's been quite some time since I've received any, though not receiving any from you dampened my spirits a little. I'm hoping I'll have better luck next time, Sweet.

It's still cold and raining outside. Not very hard, just drizzling enough to make things look miserable. Anyway, I'm camped in the barracks here<sup>1</sup>, so it really doesn't matter that much, does it.

I'm going to send you a snap, Dearest. One that was taken in the desert after the derby<sup>2</sup>. Don't blame us if we look a bit queer as it wasn't our fault.

Well, Darling, I haven't any more news to tell you. My feet are that cold the circulation has nearly stopped, so I'll close this, Sweet, and try to get them warm again. Cheerio, my Love. All my love and best wishes.

*From your ever-loving fiancé  
 NED*

1. The barracks were at Aleppo.

2. The "derby" refers to the Tobruk Derby, also known as the Benghazi Handicap – the nickname given to the rapid withdrawal of the 9th Division into Tobruk when pursued by Rommel in April 1941.

## *It was the first time I've seen snow*

*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Sunday, 1 February 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, I've received two letters from you since sending my last letter. Maybe you can guess how pleased I was to hear from you at last. I'm very sorry, Sweet, to hear that you have been sick. I hope you are better again by now.

Things are still the same over here and I'm in quite good health, but I haven't found out yet how to keep my feet warm. The weather is still as cold as charity, and since my last letter there's been a light fall of snow – about 6 inches. It was the first time I've seen snow and I'm hoping it's the last, too. We had a bit of fun, snow fighting and such, till the novelty wore off. But it proved a little too cold for me, Darling, and I'm sure I can live without seeing any more.

Well, Dearest, one of your letters I received had been salvaged. It certainly had been through the mill all right – burnt and soaked – but I was still able to understand it okay.

I don't suppose, Sweet, you really believe me when I say there's not much news over here. Nevertheless, it's true. I half wish something would start again so as to make the time go quicker. It gets very monotonous doing what we do here – guards and such things as that. It seems to make the time drag.

You say, Darling, you'll have to take me in hand and show me how to dance again when I get back. Well, my Love, I'm afraid you'll have to take me in hand over a lot more things than that. I wouldn't know how to act if I was chucked into civvie life now, so you may have your work cut out, eh. Think you'll like that?

Well, dearest Sweet Heart, I'll have to say cheerio. All my love and best wishes.

*From your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*



**Above:** Ned in the snow at Aleppo.  
[Ned, NF61, 1942]

TO MY PRECIOUS SWEET HEART – Well, Dearest, it's two weeks since I last wrote to you. I hope it doesn't make you think any the less of me because I haven't been writing to you as often as I used to. I just can't seem to settle down to anything now, let alone writing letters. Everything seems to be in a hell of a mess, and what makes it worse, we're not doing anything here but guards and other duties on the same lines, while we should be on our way back home to where we are needed. The boys are getting very restless here.

We are all hoping that if we aren't sent back that they'll put us into action in the near future. It will be better than what we are doing now, even though some of us will get skittled. Sometimes, Darling, I think being skittled would be better than staying in this place. But then, Dawn Dearest, I think of you and things seems to brighten up a bit; I realise that if something is worth having, it's worth fighting and waiting for. I'd wait till hell freezes, if only we could be together again after it's all over.

Well, Precious, I've got a lot of work to do, so I'll leave this till I get another chance to finish. Cheerio, Precious.

16.2.1941 – Well, Darling, as you see by the above date another day has passed and we have had a busy day, too. Shifted camp again and I have landed on guard as well, worse luck. It's just a case of rolling or unrolling your bed all the time here. No stopping in the one place for long. It's getting me down, damn it all.

We've just heard the latest news – that Singapore has surrendered. That's very nice to hear, especially when we're in this God-forsaken hole and it looks as if we'll be staying. I guess we'll have to make the best of it, eh, Darling, but I do wish the people of Australia would wake up and say they want the AIF back.

Well, my Love, I could tell you a few truths about this place, but I won't bore you with details. All I'll say is that if I stay here much longer I'll go completely nuts. I'm a bit that way now, I think. With all its tribulations, the desert was preferable to this.

I'm glad, Dearest, you've been enjoying yourself a little back there. I only wish I could here, but one can only smoke and drink beer. There are no girls, no dances, and only two pictures a week.

By the way, Sweet Heart, I haven't received your second parcel yet. Maybe it got sunk by the Japs. I got one of your letters partially destroyed not so long ago, and maybe some others have gone that way, too.

Well, Honey, it certainly was tough having to walk home from the dance, but next time just think of us. We march 10 to 15 miles every morning for a bit of exercise – though I wouldn't advise you to try that.

I've just had a bit of a snack and am feeling pretty good now. Coffee and toast is all right at midnight on a cold night. It certainly helps one along. The weather is getting warmer lately, though the nights are still cold enough to keep one indoors and muffled up.

Sweet, did you get that snap I sent? The one with a few of the boys and myself standing alongside a truck<sup>1</sup>. We don't look too clean, do we. Didn't have a wash for over three weeks before that was taken, and we had covered a few miles too.

Well, my precious Darling, I can't find anything to comment about in those letters of yours, so I'll have to struggle along without. Mother wrote and told me that Clive had left. His address is Gull Force, AIF Abroad, whatever that means. I haven't the faintest idea. It's evidently to stop their mail getting mixed up with ours, I suppose. I'll have to drop him a line one of these days.

Well, Dearest, I'll have to close this now. Gee I wish I was back there with you. I seem to be always thinking of you. Cheerio till we meet again, Sweet Heart.

*All my love  
from your loving fiancé  
NED*

1. The photo is on p148.



*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Wednesday, 4 March 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, this is just a short note to let you know I'm still okay, and to be truthful, feeling very much homesick at the moment. The padre came out to us this evening and brought a gramophone along with him and I've been over listening to it. It was very pleasant to hear some good music again. Very seldom do we get the chance here, worse luck.

Things are still the same over this way, the same old monotonous round. We are doing a few route marches lately to get us hardened up a bit. We need it too, just quietly.

Just where I am now there are a lot of old ruins, Roman, thousands of years old. They're rather interesting, but I'm darned if I know how they built them. You should see the size of the rocks they used.

I went into Aleppo on leave recently. There's not much to see there. No cabarets or anything like that. The only things of interest are the citadel, bazaar and museum. The citadel is in the middle of the town. It's really an old fort built hundreds of years ago situated on a hill. It's all in ruins now. The museum is something on the same lines: carvings and pottery and weapons of the same period as the citadel. The bazaar, well, it's rather wonderful the things they make in it. It's all underground. The only thing that doesn't suit us are the prices. They're a bit hot. There are some very beautiful silk weaves, cushion covers, dressing gowns, etc, but they are a bit too expensive.

Dearest, I suppose you are wondering why I haven't been writing so often lately. Well, I've been expecting to hear from you, but so far nothing has turned up. It looks as if all our mail's gone west, worse luck. It's not just me – most of the boys have stopped writing till they get some mail.

There's nothing much to write about, Sweet, except to tell you how much I love you and long for you, Dearest. I think I'll go mad if they don't send us back soon or start something here to keep our minds off home. It's damn rotten how badly things are going over there, and us over here.

Our beloved Lord Haw Haw paid us a great honour the other week over the radio. He's been having a few cracks at us lately, but the two that tickled us most were when he said that the Sixth and Seventh Division would get home, but the Ninth (that's us) would have to swim the last couple of hundred miles. The next crack was that we had better eat a lot of gold fish, otherwise the gold fish would be eating us. Gold fish, by the way, are what we call herrings. We used to get a lot of them to eat once, but not such a lot now, thank goodness.

PRECIOUS, I started this letter last night but got too sleepy to finish it, so I'm having another try tonight. It's been raining here all day, and as we are camped on a red-soil flat, things are a bit muddy. I suppose you think I'm never satisfied, eh; that I'm always growling about it being either too dry, too wet, too hot, too cold or some other darn thing. Well, complaining is the only thing I am really good at now.

I suppose everyone is thinking I'm a poor sort of specimen for not answering their letters. But Dearest, I really don't feel like it. For a long time I've fully intended to answer them, but I just can't get started.

Too lazy I guess. So give them my apologies, please, and don't you think too hard of me, Darling. I couldn't stand you going crook at me. Not now anyway. Tell them, Dawn, they might hear from me during the next couple of years if I'm still over here – and if they're lucky.

By the way, Sweet Heart, I sent you a couple of *AIF News*. I hope you get them okay. As for souvenirs, Precious, when I left Aussie I said I wasn't sending any back. I haven't so far and I don't intend to. Every time I see a tablecloth or something with Palestine or Syria printed on it, it makes me sick. If you put anything like that in front of me when I get home I'm likely to go off my nut and do something drastic and finish up in gaol.

Something I forgot to tell you, Sweet Heart. Before I left Palestine I saw Jim Gerald's AIF concert party<sup>1</sup>. It was well-worth seeing too. I wish it would come up here.

Well, my precious Love, I've already written over the limit. We are only supposed to write two pages a letter because of the mail service. I haven't the faintest idea when you'll get this but when you do, please excuse the scribble and mistakes as I'm in bed writing this. We have no table, worse luck.

Well, darling Love, I'll have to close and get to sleep as it's getting late. I'm always thinking of you, Sweet Heart. I even dream of you. You are hardly ever out of my thoughts, Dearest, I love you so much. I would risk anything to get back to you now. I don't know why we ever parted. Cheerio to you, Sweet Heart.

*All my love and kisses  
from your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*



**Above:** Ned's 45th letter from overseas (of 111 he'd written to Dawn to date) sent in a green envelope.

1. Jim Gerald was an Australian comedian born in 1891. In April 1941 he was appointed Honorary Lieutenant Colonel in the AIF and placed in charge of the Entertainment Unit. His show, *All in Fun*, featured a band, comedians, singers,

jugglers, acrobats, trick cyclists and a female chorus line recruited in Tel Aviv. The first performance was held near Gaza on 16 December 1941. One newspaper judged it "The best show in the Middle East".

*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Friday, 2 April 1942*

TO MY DEAREST BELOVED FIANCÉE – Well, Dearest, since last writing to you I've completed a five-day hike over rather mountainous country. About 75 miles all told, of which about half was cross-country. There was some very pretty scenery on the way, but, as you can guess, we didn't have much time to stop and look at it. We were very pleased to finish the march, I may add.

Darling, I suppose you are wondering why you haven't been hearing from me so regularly. Well, I suppose you know all mail goes boat mail now and it takes a lot longer to get places, and they have been pretty severe in the training over here lately – we go out early and come back late – and we haven't any lights in the tents to write by, so we can't write as often as we would like to.

I received a couple of letters and a parcel from you this week and was I pleased to get them. The letters took about 12 weeks to arrive. Quite a time, eh, Sweet, but they arrived and that's the main thing, isn't it.

Precious, there's no leave from this place<sup>1</sup>, and anyway, there's no place handy to go to. I saw Jim Gerald's show again during this week. He's up round here now, but it was nearly the same as when in Palestine.

Well, Dearest, it's Easter again. Good Friday today and we are having a rest this morning because of a night manoeuvre in the offing. It's a little different to last Easter, eh, Sweet, when I was stuck in the desert, wondering what was going to happen next. This place is nearly as bad, really. We're stuck here wondering if we'll get home or not. It's been given out that we are to stay here and continue training – as if we aren't trained enough now. Of course we are peeved. If it's good enough for one lot to go back, it should be okay for the lot to go. The boys are as mad as hell about it, but maybe it'll come good and we do go. All the boys here are very crooked on Curtin. He's not at all popular with us, nor is his government. The boys consider we've been sold out.

WELL, LOVE, I started this letter yesterday, but had to leave to do some more training (how I hate that word) and this is the first chance I've had to get back on the job. We were up half the night and they had the hide to send us out again this afternoon. It's rotten here: no beer, no leave, plenty of rumours and work, and not much chance of coming back to you.

I'm glad you heard my cheerio call over the radio at Christmas. I didn't have much time to get it ready and we were only allowed a certain number of words in which to mention as many names as possible – and I only mentioned your name. How did my voice sound? Did you recognise it? Hardly, eh.

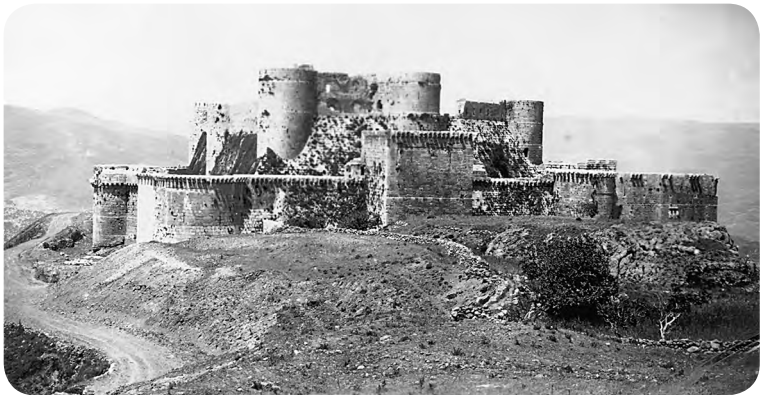
Well, Precious, I got another inoculation today. They certainly pump plenty of serum into us over here. Summer has arrived at last and we are allowed to wear shorts and shirts again. The only snag is that we have to change into longs and roll our sleeves down at dark. We are in the malaria belt and they are taking all necessary precautions to ensure us not catching fever.

Give my regards to all back there, Dearest, and don't run away with one of the Yanks before I get back, will you.

Don't worry about me, please. I'm quite okay, even if I'm not enjoying myself much. I know it's a lot to ask you to wait for me, Darling, but we'll make up for it when I get back, which I pray won't be long now.

Cheerio, Dearest. May the day be not too far distant when we meet again. All my love to you, Sweet Heart, and all my kisses too. I love you a darn site more now than I ever did, and it will be the day of days when I see you again.

*From your ever truly-loving fiancé  
NED*



1. Ned was in Latakia.



*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Friday, 24 April 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, I haven't heard from you for quite some time now. I suppose it's just the same with you and my letters. I received two letters from Mother last week, both written in February, but very welcome all the same.

Dearest, since last writing to you we've finished another march. Took five days to do 90 miles. Not a bad effort for poor mugs like us, eh. I've also had my first swim since leaving the desert, and it was grand. But then, any water would have felt grand after a 20-mile hike to get there, wouldn't it. I took a few snaps on the march, but don't know whether to send them to you or wait till I get back myself. That seems further off than ever now, worse luck. Anyway, the breaks have to come our way sometime, haven't they, Sweet, so maybe I'll hang on to them.

Well, Sweet Heart, the scenery round here isn't much. One side overlooks the sea, and the other side has a mountain with a bit of snow on top – and still it's damn hot.

It's Anzac Day tomorrow, Sweet. I suppose it won't be such a big day back there this time.

Our dear friend Lord Haw Haw seems quite peeved with us (the 9th Division). His latest quip is that seeing the British haven't enough planes to take us home he'll supply the Luftwaffe to escort us on our way – to hell, I suppose, if he had the chance, eh.

Well, dearest Sweet Heart, I'll have to say cheerio as I've no more news and it's nearly time for mess. So long, Darling. All my love's with you, Sweet.

*From your ever-truly fiancé  
NED*

**Opposite:** Three scenes from the second long march. The top photo (NF64) is of the Marqab Citadel, built in the 12th century as a crusader fortress. It is perched on a hill 500 metres above sea level, overlooking the Mediterranean, 35 miles south of Latakia on the road to Tripoli.

The middle photo, NF65, is of unidentified ruins.

The bottom photo, NF71, was taken at Idlib before the march began. Some of the distances indicated are:

- Lattaquie (Latakia) 127 kms
- Tripoli (not the Tripoli in Libya) 226 kms
- Beyrouth (Beirut) 316 kms



IN MARCH 1942, Ned's Battalion completed a 75-mile march from Idlib to Latakia. The success of this march resulted in a second, from Latakia to Tripoli. Below are extracts from the diary of 'D' Company, describing the first march.

*Thursday 12 March* – 'D' Company commenced march at 0845. For transport we have one 3-ton truck and the water truck. The men wear battle order, save that they do not carry respirators. The arrangements are as follows: the truck goes ahead to the camp site carrying cooks and kitchen gear. The truck then returns, collects blanket rolls and takes them to camp. On its final trip, lunch is carried to the troops.

The going was very heavy, across ploughed fields and hilly country. When the ground permitted, 'D' company moved in arrowhead formation.

Camp was made on a hillside. The march gave everyone a good appetite and also some blistered feet, a few men being unable to continue further.

*Friday 13 March* – Cripples stayed in camp to come on by truck. Our route left the road and led down the bed of a stream, which rapidly deepened into a steep ravine with the company scrambling over stones and along sheep tracks. The going grew worse, but finally we emerged onto the road. After marching a couple of miles and having lunch, we struck across country. Camp was made in an olive grove.

*Saturday 14 March* – Quite a number of men have

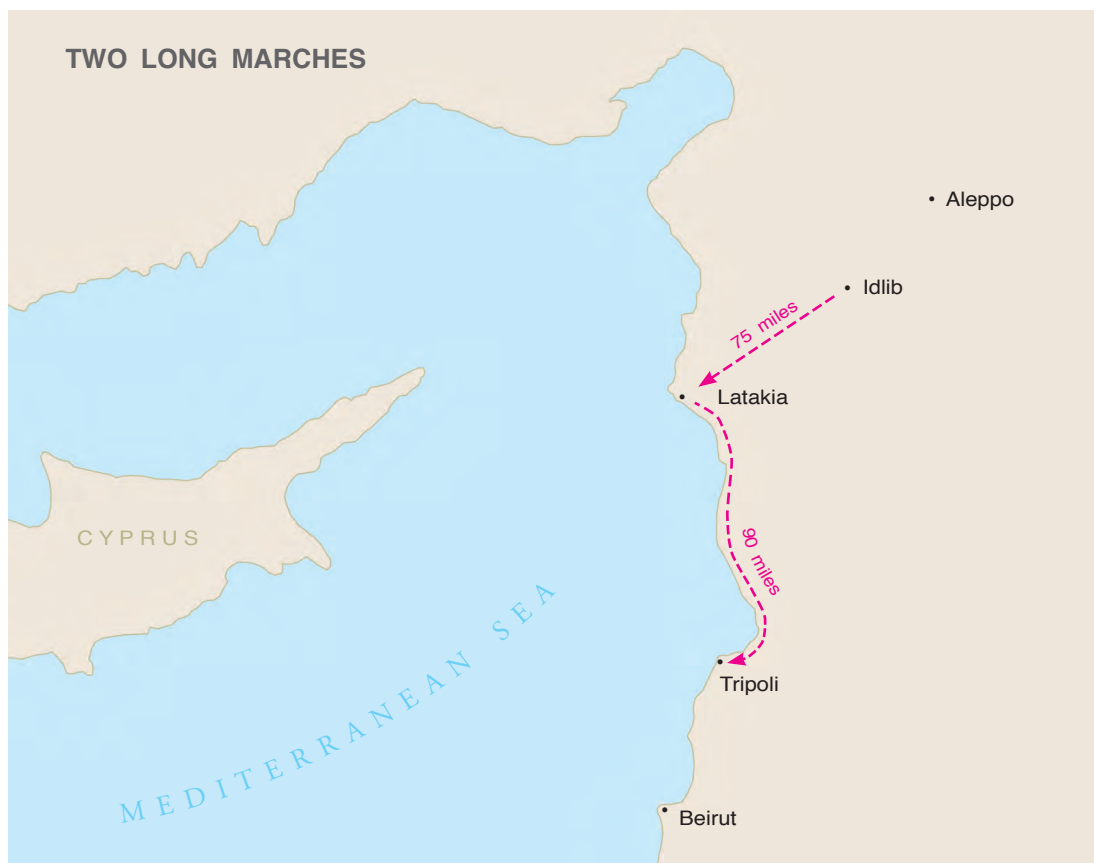
fallen out and the strength actually marching is now 115. The route led straight up a rough path which wound its way to the top of a cliff. We met the road again winding along a hillside.

The camp site is very picturesque. Mountains all around and clusters of native houses cling to the cliff in front of us. Late in the evening, natives stole five blankets from 16 Platoon. The local gendarmerie were informed and raids were made on the surrounding villages.

*Sunday 15 March* – Uneventful day, the route entirely along the road. As we passed the gendarmerie post, some of the stolen articles were returned. We reached camp at about 1500 hrs. The Pay Sgt arrived, and three cases of beer were also sent out, the troops passing the most carnival evening of the whole trip.

*Monday 14 March* – Five miles along the road we branched off and tackled the hardest portion of the exercise – an almost perpendicular climb up a watercourse for 750 feet. In places we had to pull ourselves up by our hands and most of the men were very nearly spent when they reached the top. A short pause and we set off again following a track which led up and down hillsides, through a small native village, and finally back to our old friend the road. We reached camp, set in a large olive grove, a little after 1700 hrs.

*Tuesday 17 March* – Men marched to the river for washing and a swim. The whole of the 9th Division seems to be congregating in this vicinity.



*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Friday, 15 May 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, precious Love, it's a long time now since I last heard from you, or so it seems. I've received three letters from Mother since your last, so maybe that's why it seems so long ago, eh, Sweet. Or is it that you have found someone else? They tell us over here that the Yanks are real nice guys. What do you think of them, Sweet?

We are getting a pretty rough time over here now: not as much leave, the food is worse than what we used to eat in the desert, and a good few of the lads have been AWL lately – and I don't blame them any, either. I'm thinking of going myself, so don't worry or be surprised if I write and say I'm a Private again.

To be honest, Darling, everything stinks here [...censored...] and I guess I'm as bad as the rest now. Nearly every chance we get we go and get drunk. It's the only outlet we have, so please, Darling, don't be too hard on me. I'll cut it out when I get back to you, Love.

By the way, what would you do if I did come home drunk? Kick me out? Or look after me and put me to bed? Let me know, Dearest, as I would like to know just what's in store for me if it ever happens.

There's one thing you need never worry about, Dearest, and that's about girls. I'm not interested in them over here, and it wouldn't be much use even if I was. So all's serene on that score, eh, Sweetest.

I went for a trip to the mountains near here a couple of Sundays ago. It was rather pleasant too. We managed to climb to 5000 feet. We didn't have enough time to reach the snow, though we did get above the clouds. It was just like being in a plane. It was rather a pleasant afternoon and all the lads enjoyed it.

I also went down town<sup>1</sup> yesterday afternoon, Precious, to see the picture *Gone With The Wind*<sup>2</sup>. It was well worth going to see. It took four hours to show the whole film. Did you see it, Sweet? It's really worth going to.

WELL, DEAREST LOVE, I started this letter last night but didn't quite finish and I have a bit more news to tell you. Our Sarge told me this morning I'm going on two days' leave on the 18th. Quite a nice surprise, eh. It was to me, anyway. Six days in 16 months isn't very good, but it's the best they think of giving me. So I won't be going AWL for a while now.

We are camped near the beach here, Sweet, so we get a swim nearly every afternoon. One bright hour in a host of gloomy ones.

Remember Ray Cassidy, Darling? He's back in Aus now. He transferred and his new unit went home, lucky blighter. I get so damned wild when I think of us still over here and the rest at home. The "Unlucky 9th Div" they call us now. It's enough to drive the best to drink, let alone me.

By the way, Dawn, in four days time I'll have been in the AIF two years. 20th May is the date. I'll be on leave with one of the boys who signed up with me. We're going to celebrate. God knows what for – not because we've enjoyed these two years. Just to get away from everything in life, I guess.

Darling, there's one thing I still hold dear to me, Sweet, and that's you and the memory of the time we spent together before I left. I love you, Sweet Heart. I know I'm no angel (never was and never will be I suppose),

***Or is it that you have found someone else?***



**Above:** Unidentified soldier and Arab, looking towards the mountains that Ned climbed in early May 1942. See letter, this page. [Ned, NF91, 1942]

and I realise I didn't treat you exactly right when we were together. I hope you'll understand and forgive me and keep on loving me as I love you, Precious, more than I can ever put on paper.

Darling, there's a lot of things we have to talk about when I return. The future, and you and me mainly. Till then, Sweet Heart, we'll have to wait in hope and love. Cheerio, Darling. Give my regards to all, please. Wishing you the best of everything and all my love and kisses.

*From your ever-loving fiancé*  
NED

P.S. This letter might be in a bit of a mess by the time it reaches you, Dear. It's got to be censored yet, so don't worry if you can't read it all or understand parts of it. So long.

*Lots of love and may God bless you*  
NED

1. Down town: Tripoli.

2. Entertainment was not restricted to films and concerts. One popular venue in Tripoli was the brothel *Maison Doree*. All troops visiting the brothel were required to register their number and unit in a record book kept at the front door. [Let *Enemies Beware*: p119]



# Rommel takes Tobruk

Edited extracts, *The Rommel Papers*, 191-232

## JUNE – JULY 1942



DURING THE FIRST WEEK of June while still at Tripoli, most members of Ned's battalion were granted leave to visit Beirut; and a warning order was received requiring the battalion to prepare for a return to Idlib. The camp area was vacated on 17 June and the men boarded a midnight train.

The Australian 9th Division's stay in Syria was coming to an end. Tobruk fell to Rommel on 21 June, and by month's end, with the scent of the Suez Canal in his nostrils, Rommel had reached the Allied defences at El Alamein.

The 9th Division was ordered to move immediately. It was in position at El Alamein by mid-July, ready to take on Rommel one last time – but without Ned. Early in July before the move to El Alamein, Ned was demoted to Private (see letter 11/7/1942). He was relegated to the Left Out of Battle (LOB) group and did not see action at El Alamein until Operation Bulimba on 1 September.

*QX3199 L/Cpl E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Thursday, 11 June 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, I received two letters from you a week or so ago, the first for quite some time, so you can guess how pleased I was. I also received a couple of letters and a cable from Mother for my birthday, but nothing from you yet.

I spent two days' leave in Beirut a while back. It was a break from camp life and it came in handy to celebrate my two years in the AIF. Oh, we enjoyed it all right, in the way we enjoy anything here. I also celebrated my birthday last Sunday but not too wisely – to my sorrow next day. It was my third birthday since joining up.

I've spent another day in the mountains near here. I wouldn't mind spending a bit of leave up there. It's rather pretty and fairly quiet, also nice and cool, and of course there's plenty of beer.

By the way, Sweet Heart, how about sending more snaps. I liked the last one very much, but could do with a few more, please. I have about 50 here to send you, but I've been saving them up so I could bring them back myself.

Well, my dearest Love, I've nothing more of interest to write about. I'm in fairly good health, but feeling rather fed up with life on the whole and this country in particular. Give my regards to all who know me.

Oh, and about your dancing partner, Sweet. Better tell him I might go looking for his scalp when I get back. See what he thinks. Cheerio, Dawn. All my love to you.

*From yours ever truly  
NED*



AFTER THE CONCLUSION of our counter-offensive, which had led at the beginning of 1942 to the reconquest of Cyrenaica<sup>1</sup>, serious difficulties arose over supplies. The blame for this – apart from the scant attention given to the African theatre of war by the German High Command, which failed to recognise its immense importance – lay with the half-hearted conduct of the war at sea by the Italians. The British Navy, in contrast, was very active in the early part of 1942, and the RAF was also extremely troublesome.

The German High Command did not realise that with relatively small means we could have won victory in North Africa which, in strategic and economic value, would have far surpassed the possibilities in Russia. Ahead of us lay a territory, the Middle East, containing an enormous wealth of raw materials which could have freed us from all our anxieties about oil. A few more divisions for my army, with supplies for them guaranteed, would have sufficed to bring about the complete defeat of the entire British forces in North Africa. But it was not to be. Our demands for additional formations were refused on the grounds that with the huge demand for transport which the Russian front was making on Germany's limited productive capacity, the creation of further motorised units for Africa was out of the question. It was obvious that the High Command's opinion had not changed from that which they had expressed in 1941, namely, that Africa was a "lost cause" and that any large-scale investment of material and troops in that theatre would pay no dividends. A short-sighted and misguided view! With only three German divisions, whose fighting strength was often ludicrously small, we kept the British Army busy in Africa for 18 long months and gave them many a trouncing, until our strength finally ran out at Alamein.

The consequences were very serious. After the loss of Africa an increasing number of German divisions had to be employed against the British and Americans, until, finally, some 70 divisions were thrown into the fighting in Italy and France; whereas in the summer of 1942, given six German mechanised divisions, we could have smashed the British so thoroughly that the threat from Africa would have been eliminated for a long time to come.

There is no doubt that adequate supplies could have been organised if the will had been there. After March 1942 (during which month only 18,000 tons reached us out of a total supply requirement of 60,000 tons), and up until the fall of Tobruk in June, the situation improved thanks to the initiative of Field-Marshal Kesselring, whose air force succeeded in attaining air superiority over the Mediterranean during the spring. Our heavy air raids against Malta in particular, were instrumental in practically neutralising, for a time, the threat to our sea routes. It was this fact which made possible an increased flow of material to Tripoli, Benghazi and Derna, and the reinforcement and refitting of the German-Italian forces thereupon proceeded with all speed. Nevertheless, it was obvious that the British Eighth Army could still be reinforced more rapidly than our own. The British Government was making tremendous efforts to provide its army with all the material they could lay their hands on. Large convoys were arriving one after the other in the Egyptian ports, bringing war material round the Cape from Britain or America. This 12,000-mile voyage, which the British transports could make only once or twice a year at most, was caused immense difficulties by our U-boat warfare, but in spite of this the British Navy was able to maintain supplies to the British forces on a scale far superior to our own, even over this huge distance. Moreover, the British could get all the petrol they wanted, and more, from the refineries in the Middle East.

It was clear to us that the British would try to destroy our army with all the means at their disposal as soon as they felt themselves strong enough to do so. Our

1. Cyrenaica was the term used for the eastern part of Libya.

southern flank in Libya lay wide open and they had a large choice of possible operations to choose from, posing a constant threat to our supply lines. Retreat, if we were forced into it by the danger of being outflanked to our south, would be fraught with tremendous difficulties, due to the fact that most of my Italian divisions were non-motorised. But the British were not to have the chance of exploiting their opportunities, for I had decided to strike first.

The British dispositions in the general area of Tobruk had been planned with great skill. All fortified points were provided with powerful artillery, infantry and armoured-car units, and abundant supplies. The entire defence was remarkable for the extraordinary degree of technical skill which had gone into its construction. All positions and strong-points conformed to the most modern requirements of warfare. Over a million mines had been laid, and judging by the 150,000 or so which were later picked up by my men behind the defended areas, even more mining had been planned. Besides the fully motorised forces I have mentioned, the British had a mobile reserve in position behind the main defence works, consisting of powerful armoured and mechanised units. The skilful construction of their defence works made their lines very tough nuts for us to crack.

## THE SECOND BATTLE FOR TOBRUK

Tobruk was one of the strongest fortresses in North Africa. In 1941, with magnificent troops in its garrison, it had presented us with immense difficulties. Many of our attacks collapsed in its defences, and much of its outer perimeter had literally been soaked in blood. Often the battle had raged round a square yard at a time. We were no strangers to Tobruk.

We intended this time to attack and storm the fortress according to the plan which we had finally evolved in late 1941, but which had been forestalled by the British offensive<sup>1</sup>. Under this plan, a feint attack was first to be launched in the southwest to conceal our true design and pin down the garrison at that point. The formations assigned to make the main assault were to arrive on the scene unexpectedly. To this end they were to move on eastwards past Tobruk in order to give the impression that we intended to lay siege to the fortress as in 1941. Then they were to switch back suddenly to the southeastern front of the fortress, deploy for the assault during the night, and after a heavy dive-bomber and artillery bombardment, launch their assault at dawn and overrun the surprised enemy. To every man of us, Tobruk was a symbol of British resistance and we were now going to finish with it for good.

On the morning of the 16th June, fighting at Gazala had finally ceased and another 6000 British troops had found their way into our prison camps. Evidence of the British defeat could be seen all along the road and verges. Vast quantities of material lay on all sides; burnt-out vehicles stood black and empty in the sand. Whole convoys of undamaged British lorries had fallen into our hands, some of which had been pressed into service immediately by the fighting troops, while others were awaiting collection by the salvage squads.

I met some of my troops advancing eastwards from the Gazala line and gave them orders to push on as fast as they could to the western edge of Tobruk. One of the first lessons I had drawn from my experience of motorised warfare was that speed of manoeuvre in operations, and quick reaction in command are decisive. Troops must be able to carry out operations at top speed and in complete coordination. To be satisfied with norms is fatal. One must constantly demand and strive for maximum performance, for the side which makes the greater effort is the faster – and

the faster wins the battle.

The whole of the Afrika Korps, and the Italians, were now put on the march to Gambut and the area to its south. We wanted, as I have already said, to divert British attention from Tobruk. Primarily, however, this advance was directed against the RAF which, with its short flight time from neighbouring bases, was being unpleasantly attentive. We intended to clear them off their airfield near Gambut and keep them out of the way during our assault on Tobruk. So now my army was moving east again.

At about 2200 hrs on the 17th June, I arrived at Gambut with the leading troops. The main body remained lying before the minefields all night. On the 18th, the 21st Panzer Division reached the road and railway shortly before 0430 hrs. This railway, which the British had built during the past few months, ran from Mersa Matruh to the outer perimeter of Tobruk. We crossed it, demolishing some of the track on the way. On the airfields, which the British had not evacuated until the last moment, we captured 15 serviceable aircraft and considerable quantities of oil and petrol, which came in very useful.

On arriving back that night at Army HQ, we found life being made unpleasantly hazardous by the activities of a British 25-pounder battery, which began to shell our position. I sent Captain Kiehl to drive it off, which he did, but the British promptly selected another site and began to honour us with their attentions again. I soon became bored with this and shifted my HQ back to El Hatian, where the British staff had formerly been housed.

Mopping up of the area between Tobruk and Gambut was completed on 18th June and the necessary moves carried out for the assault on Tobruk. During our advance we had found some of the artillery depots and ammunition dumps which we had been forced to abandon during our retreat in late 1941. They were still where we had left them, and were now put to good use.

The Afrika Korps moved into its new position on the afternoon of 19th June. We had the impression that evening that our movements had only been partially and inaccurately observed by the enemy, and there was therefore every chance that our attack would achieve complete surprise. In the western desert outside the fortress of Tobruk there was no British armour of any consequence and we could, therefore, look forward with great hopes to the forthcoming enterprise. In spite of the hard time we had been through, my army was on its toes and confident of victory. On the eve of the battle every man was keyed up and tense for attack.

## THE CONQUEST OF TOBRUK

Although the Tobruk garrison was of approximately the same strength as it had been in 1941, it could not be expected to put up such a stubborn and well-organised resistance, for the bulk of the troops had already given us battle and were tired and dispirited. The British command, moreover, which never was very quick at reorganising, had been given no time to build-up its defensive machine.

Tobruk, hemmed in on its eastern and western sides by rocky and trackless country, extends to the south into a flat and sandy plain. It had been extremely well-fortified by the Italians and full account had been taken of the most modern weapons. The numerous defence positions running in a belt around the fortress were sunk in the ground in such a manner that they could only be located from the air. They consisted of two lines of strong-points, not in the usual form of concrete boxes with peep-holes, but completely sunk into the ground.

Each strong-point had a diameter of about 90 yards and consisted of

1. Operation Crusader. See p140.



several heavily-concreted dugouts, or nests, each holding 30 to 40 men. They featured a communications trench – an underground tunnel system leading into the antitank and machine-gun nests. These nests, of which most of the defence positions had a considerable number, waited until the moment of greatest danger before throwing off their camouflage and pouring a murderous fire into our attacking troops. Artillery could not take them under direct fire because there was nothing on which to take aim.

The outer belt of strong-points was surrounded by an antitank ditch, covered with thin boarding disguised by a layer of sand and stones on top, so that it could not be detected even at the shortest distance. As with the antitank ditch, the communications trench, which was 8 feet deep, was covered with boards topped lightly with earth. Each work was surrounded by barbed wire entanglements and all were inter-connected by the same.

The second defence line, which lay two to three thousand yards behind the first, was of similar design but without the antitank ditch.

Behind the two belts of strong-points were field positions, several forts, and powerful artillery concentrations. The majority of the defence works were protected by deep minefields.

*20 June 1942*

Dearest Lu<sup>1</sup> – Only two hours' sleep last night. This is the really decisive day. Hope my luck holds. I'm very tired, though quite well otherwise.

My assault force moved into its assembly areas on the night of the 19th June. At 0520 hrs, several hundred aircraft hammered their bombs on the break-in point southeast of the fortress. I watched the effect of this attack. Great fountains of dust plumed up out of the strong-points, whirling entanglements and weapons high into the air. Bomb after bomb tore through the enemy wire.

As soon as the aircraft had finished, the infantry moved forward to the assault. Lanes had been cleared through the mines the night before. Two hours later the storming parties had succeeded in driving a wedge into the British defences. One position after another was attacked and captured in fierce hand-to-hand combat.

The engineers had the antitank ditch bridged by 0800 hrs. The exploits of the engineers that day merit particular praise. It is difficult to conceive what it meant to do work of this kind under heavy British fire. Now the way was open and we unleashed the armour.

At about 0800 I drove as far as the lanes through the minefields, which lay under heavy British artillery fire. Half an hour later I crossed the antitank ditch and examined two of the captured positions. Meanwhile, the Afrika Korps was becoming the target of British tank attacks from outside the fortress and a violent tank battle flared up in which the artillery on both sides joined. Our attack moved steadily on. The Afrika Korps, after a brief action in which 50 British tanks were shot up, reached the Sidi Mahmud crossroad at about midday. We now held the key to Tobruk.

I accompanied the Afrika Korps' advance onward from the crossroad. Several British ships weighed anchor and made as if to leave harbour,

apparently attempting to get their men away by sea. I at once directed the artillery on to these targets and six ships were sunk. Most of the men aboard them were picked up.

The advance continued and we soon reached the descent into the town, where we came up against a British strong-point which fought back with extraordinary stubbornness. I sent Lieut von Schlippenbach to the garrison of 50 men with a summons to surrender. Their only answer was a withering fire on our vehicles. Eventually one of our men, covered by fire from six anti-aircraft guns, succeeded in approaching the strong-point and putting the garrison out of action with hand grenades. By nightfall  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the fortress was in our hands.

At 0500 hrs on the 21st of June I drove into the town of Tobruk. Practically every building of the dismal place was either flat or little more than a heap of rubble, mostly the result of our siege in 1941. Next I drove off along the main road to the west. Vehicles stood in flames on either side. Wherever one looked, there was chaos and destruction.

At about 0940 hrs, on the main road 4 miles west of the town, I met General Kloppe, Garrison Commandant of Tobruk. He announced his capitulation and I told him to follow me in his car. The road was lined with about 10,000 prisoners of war. On arrival at the Hotel Tobruk I talked for a while with General Kloppe and instructed him to make himself and his officers responsible for order among the prisoners, and to organise their maintenance from the captured stores.

*21 June 1942*

Dearest Lu – Tobruk! It was a wonderful battle. There is a lot going on in the fortress area. After all that has happened I must get a few hours' sleep now. How much I think of you.

For every one of my troops, the capture of Tobruk on the 21st of June was the high point of the African war, and on that day I had the following Order of the Day issued:

SOLDIERS!

The great battle has been crowned by your quick conquest of Tobruk. We have taken over 45,000 prisoners and destroyed or captured more than 1,000 armoured fighting vehicles and nearly 400 guns. During the long hard struggle of the last four weeks, you have, through your incomparable courage and tenacity, dealt the enemy blow upon blow. Your spirit of attack has cost him the core of his field army, which was standing poised for an offensive. Above all, he has lost his powerful armour. My special congratulations to officers and men for this superb achievement.

Soldiers of the Panzer Army Afrika!

Now for the complete destruction of the enemy. We will not rest until we have shattered the last remnants of the British Eighth Army. During the days to come, I shall call on you for one more great effort to bring us to this final goal.

*ROMMEL*

NEXT DAY Rommel heard by wireless from Hitler's headquarters that in reward for his victory he had been made a Field-Marshal. He was 49.

He was so busy in the days that followed that he quite forgot to change his shoulder badges to

those of his new rank – two crossed batons. It was only after he had reached El Alamein that he was reminded of this by Field-Marshal Kesselring, who gave Rommel a pair of his own badges.

Rommel received his actual baton when he saw

Hitler in Berlin in September 1942. He remarked to his wife at the time: "I would rather he had given me one more division".

*[The Rommel Papers, 232]*

1. Rommel wrote to his wife, Lu, almost every night.



## *I'm a Private again*

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Saturday, 11 July 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Thanks ever so much for your very welcome letter which I received last Sunday. I was slightly worried at not getting any word from you. I've had five letters from Mother and one only from you, so you can guess why I was wondering a little, eh, Sweet.

Well, Precious, as you see from the above I'm a Private again and I suppose you are wondering just why. Well, it's a long story. For a start there have been a few changes in the company and I didn't think that they were for the better and said so. Also, I've told a few people just what I thought of them, and that's one thing you mustn't do in the army – not to anyone your superior, anyway. It all boils down to the fact that I wouldn't crawl enough to them and do just what they wanted. So, the Company OC called me up last Sunday and told me if I didn't want the responsibility of a stripe to let someone else have it. He also added a few more words to the story so I wouldn't misunderstand. Anyway, Sweet, I took the hint and told him he could have the stripe back.

I'm not worrying about losing the stripe, but I thought it a pretty rotten thing to do just at that stage of the show. I'd had it for 10 months and had been looking after my section for nearly six months, in action and out of it, and now when we're due for action again... well, they could have let me keep it till this show was over, or have taken the stripe off me earlier. I thought I might lose it, but getting into the desert again I thought I was okay – but not so. They still like the parade-ground soldier too much, and also like a bit of the old school tie with it. Dearest, I hope you're not disappointed in me.

Just at present I'm feeling pretty rotten. I'm one of the LOB<sup>1</sup> (left out of battle) personnel, and the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life was to leave the boys and come back here while they went to have a slap at Jerry. I couldn't say goodbye to any of the lads. I just walked away and left them. A couple of the lads started to go round and shake hands before they left, but before they had gone far they were nearer to real tears than I've ever seen in a man. There's quite a few of my cobbbers detailed as LOB, and amongst them are some of the best men this battalion has. We hated like hell to leave, but we didn't have a say in the matter. The only thing I've wanted in this show was to take my old section into a decent scrap, and if I had to get skittled in doing so – well and good. But now, well, I'll see action, but with what section I don't know. And even if I get back to my old section, some faces will have gone forever – and I just can't forget that I won't be there to help them. A chap feels as if he's run out on them and can't ever look them in the eyes again. He feels he doesn't want to see them again because of that. I suppose you think I'm crazy, Darling. Well, I might be, but it affects one like that after being together with your cobbbers for so long.

I had to hand the camera in when we left, so I won't be able to get any snaps this show<sup>2</sup>, worse luck. I've got quite a few saved up, but they're liable to get lost if I send them, so I'll wait, eh.

No, Sweet, I don't mind about your friend, as long as he is only a friend. I can't help feeling a little jealous though. I'm no man of iron. Remember what I once told you, Sweetest, that if you thought you liked someone else better than me, let me know right away, won't you. I'd hate like hell to get back there and find out things from other people. I'd much rather you told me and let me get over it while I'm here.

Sweet Heart, I trust you to tell me the truth. It's not a nice thing to be misled by one you love and trust.

Well, Darling, I've just about run out of news. I could tell you more but it mightn't get past the censor. Maybe this won't either, but here's hoping anyway. Excuse the lead pencil, Precious, but I lost my old pen during the week. Also my wallet, but it didn't have much in it luckily, eh.

I'm very comfortable where I am now. I'm hoping I don't have to move. It's very handy to the beach and one can get a freshwater swim here too, so you can see I'm quite okay at present.

Precious, I'm sorry to hear that you've lost some weight since leaving Brisbane. You want to look after yourself – for me, if not for your own benefit, eh. I'm getting pretty thin myself lately, but I've got one consolation – Jerry won't be able to hit me as easily.

You ask me if I remembered the 12th of May. Yes I did, Darling. I'll always remember the day I first met you by the farm gate.

By the way, Sweet Heart, what did you mean when you said if I stayed away much longer you'd be an old married woman when I got back? Have you someone else in mind? Put me out of my misery, please, and let me know, Love.

Well, Darling, by the time you get this letter this show will be all over I guess, and things will be quiet again. In case I go, remember I loved you, Dear, and thought the world of you.

You're thinking, I suppose, Sweet, that this letter is just one long snarl, eh. Well, I've aired a few grievances, but I had to get them off my chest as I would have burst otherwise, and that would have been a calamity, eh, Darling.

Sweet Heart, I'll have to close this letter now as the mail is all going in. I'll try to drop a line to your mother some time, but I never seem to feel like writing much these days. Give my regards to all back there. Cheerio, Sweet Heart, all my love and kisses.

*From your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*

P.S. Cheer up, Sweet, and don't worry.

1. LOB: each unit was directed to leave out of battle a certain number of officers and men of all ranks. They were to remain at Alexandria when the unit went into battle so that if a unit had very heavy losses there would be a nucleus around which it could be re-formed. In an infantry battalion such as the 2/15, for example, the second-in-command, six other officers and 61 others of specified ranks or qualifications were left behind. This was a minimum, as it was also laid down that a rifle section was not to go into action with more than one NCO and seven men.

2. The 9th Division returned to the western desert at El Alamein to stop Rommel's advance into Egypt. "This show" turned out to be a four-month stand-off. The Axis forces were finally defeated at El Alamein in November 1942.



# Rommel takes Mersa Matruh

Edited extracts, *The Rommel Papers*, 234-239



IN WINNING OUR VICTORY AT TOBRUK we had expended the last of our strength, for the weeks of very heavy fighting against an enemy superior in both men and material had left their mark on my forces. Now, however, with the vast booty that had fallen to us, including ammunition, petrol, food, and war material of all kinds, a build-up for a further offensive was possible and I resolved to exploit the weakness of the British after the battle of Tobruk by thrusting forward as far and as fast as I could into Egypt. I was determined at all costs to avoid giving the British any opportunity of creating another new front and occupying it with fresh formations. The Eighth Army was now extremely weak, with a core of only two fresh infantry divisions; its armoured formations, which had been rushed up in great haste from the Egyptian hinterland, could not possibly have any striking power worth mentioning. All in all, the proportion of our strength to the British, in comparison with what it had been, was highly encouraging. Our intention was to overtake the Eighth Army's formations by a lightning thrust forward and bring them to battle before they had been able to join up with other formations from the Middle East. If we could once succeed in destroying the tattered remnants of the Eighth Army which had escaped from the Tobruk battle, plus its two fresh divisions – and this was by no means impossible – then the British would have nothing left in Egypt capable of opposing our advance to Alexandria and the Suez Canal. It was a plan with a chance of success – a try on.

Our approach march for the thrust across the Egyptian frontier went without a hitch. In spite of the strain of the previous weeks, the troops were in high spirits and the superb morale of the Panzer Army was once again evident. My forces began to move east on the 22nd June. I myself crossed the frontier on the 23rd, well behind the 90th Light Division, which had thrust a long way ahead. Heavy smoke clouds were rising far over to the east; the British had evacuated the frontier area. The mass of the Eighth Army, as we learnt from captured documents, had been ordered to take up positions at Mersa Matruh. The supreme requirement now, and for several days, was speed.

On the 24th June I rode with the 90th Light Division's column, and hour after hour urged them on to ever greater speed. Unfortunately, the Afrika Korps ran badly short of petrol that day and was immobilised for several hours. Luckily, we found a considerable quantity of British petrol and we were able to salvage a large part of the store, even though it was already burning. In spite of the difficulties, our advance continued to make good progress and by next day we had already reached a point 30 miles west of Mersa Matruh.

An astonishingly high proportion of our transport now consisted of captured British vehicles, and it was, in fact, no longer possible at any distance to distinguish us from the British. Thus, with our "British look", we managed to coax up numerous British stragglers and put them in the bag – to their intense disgust when they found out their mistake.

On the morning of the 26th June, swarms of British aircraft continued the attack and succeeded in destroying a supply column, which caused the Afrika Korps a serious petrol shortage for a time. In spite of these difficulties, we managed that day to reach a point some 10 miles southwest of Mersa Matruh. We did not expect any great British resistance here, but thought they would merely try to delay us long enough to enable them to get away the equipment of their numerous airfields and supply installations

in the area. Our intention was to bring the British to battle at this point and attempt to destroy a major part of their infantry. To this end, we planned to envelop the fortress of Mersa Matruh with its powerful garrison inside and then take it by storm.

26 June 1942

Dearest Lu – We've made a good move forward in the last few days and are hoping to launch our attack on the enemy remnants today. For days now I've been camping out in the car. Food has been good all the time, but washing has suffered. I've had my headquarters by the sea for the past 20 hours and bathed yesterday and today. But the water doesn't refresh, it's much too hot.

At about 1700 hrs on the 26th my forces moved to the assault. In spite of stubborn British resistance the attack went forward well. The bitter struggle lasted all night, with groups of British vehicles, large and small, trying the whole time to break away. Most of them were shot up. In some places the British set fire to their vehicles with the bodies of their comrades inside and tried to get away on foot. We had little difficulty in the moonlit night in rounding most of them up. Enormous fires raged in the fortress zone of Mersa Matruh.

29 June 1942

Dearest Lu – Now the battle of Mersa Matruh has also been won and our leading units are only 125 miles from Alexandria. There'll be a few more battles to fight before we reach our goal, but I think the worst is well behind us. I'm fine. Some actions make demands on one's strength to the point of bodily exhaustion, but there are quieter periods when one gets a chance to recover. We're already 300 miles east of Tobruk. British rail and road system in first-class order.

Early on the morning of the 29th June my troops forced their way into the fortress. Firing gradually died away and finally ceased. The booty was enormous. Besides the large supply dumps, war material of all kinds fell into our hands, approximating to the equipment of a whole division. Forty enemy tanks were destroyed and 6000 British troops marched into our prison camps.

The last fortress port in the western Egyptian desert was now ours, and the British had once again suffered heavy losses. Nevertheless, they had been able to get the great bulk of their infantry back to the El Alamein position, where work on the development of the defences had been going ahead at top speed for some time past. Immediately after the fall of Mersa Matruh, therefore, I set my troops on the march again. We planned to get through to the Alamein line and overrun it while it was still incomplete and before the retreating remnants of the Eighth Army had had time to organise its defence. This line was the last bastion on which the British could oppose our advance. Once through it, our road was clear.

30 June 1942

Dearest Lu – Mersa Matruh fell yesterday, after which the army moved on until late in the night. We're already 60 miles to the east. Less than 100 miles to Alexandria!



*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Monday, 27 July 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, thanks ever so much for your very welcome letters I received this morning. I was ever so pleased to hear from you again. I've been feeling pretty blue lately and they quite cheered me up no end. You could have done better though, Sweet. You seem to have dropped your chin and forgotten how to smile. Keep smiling, Dearest, and keep your chin up and hope for the best. It always comes to those who wait, you know. And don't forget, it's not easy for us over here to be ready for a scrap when everything stands as it does now. So cheer up, Sweet Heart. You don't improve things for us fighting boys when you chuck in your bundle like that. I'd hate to say, or have anyone else say, that the girl I loved couldn't take it.

Well, Love, this seems very much like a lecture, eh, but I hope you understand what I mean.

Darling, you certainly seem to like that boyfriend of yours<sup>1</sup>. I can't say I'm not jealous and be truthful, but as long as you still love me and keep true, I can't mind really, can I. As for Betty Keating, Sweetest, I haven't heard from or written to her this year, or for the last six months anyway. Matter of fact, Sweet, you and Mother are the only ones I write to now.

Darling, I do love you and it would give me a bit of a knock if you did fall for someone else, but if you love this friend of yours, well, Dear, it's okay with me. Make sure first, and please don't keep me in suspense.

I also received some letters from Mum and she told me that Clive was a prisoner of war. I suppose you know. I hope he's not in too bad a shape. It'll be a bit of a blow to Mum. And I'd hate to think how she'll take it, Sweet, if anything happens to me over here. So if I do get bumped off, could you go down to her? Of course, Sweet, I'm not in it as yet, but there's plenty of time to be called up front. By the time you get this, this show will be over anyway, I suppose, and maybe I'll be on the way back. Here's hoping anyway.

You mentioned a chap Coleman and asked me if I knew him. Yes I do, but only slightly. He was in this company for a while, but I didn't know he was from Monto.

No, Sweetest, no DSO<sup>2</sup> as yet. Don't worry about that; I'll watch out.

You're not the only one who was hoping for a mate to keep one warm this winter, but it's not to be. We'll just have to wait, eh, Darling. That is, of course, if you're still willing to wait.

I told you I was back in Egypt, didn't I? And as you know, Egypt and sand go hand in hand, worse luck.

I've been playing nursemaid to the POW Ities lately, but they seem a very peaceful mob and we've no worries about them.

Well, my Darling, I haven't any more news to offer. I hope you don't get peeved with this letter, but I'm all upside down. One thing you can be sure of, Sweetest, is that I love you. So cheer up, Sweet Heart. All my love and kisses.

*Your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*

## Ned's Brother a POW



Above: Clive's enlistment photo.  
[C16, 1940]

1. The boyfriend was probably Jack Woodbridge; see p190.

2. DSO: Distinguished Service Order.



18H/MR

TELEPHONES—

## Australian Military Forces.

Please quote this Number when replying.

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A.R.POSTAddress Queensland Echelon and Records  
Date WARWICK.

15 SEP 1945

Mr. W. W. Flewell-Smith,  
Yeronga Service Station,  
Fairfield Road,  
YERONGA. Bne.

Dear Mr. Flewell-Smith,

QX10858 Sapper Clive Birdwood FLEWELL-SMITH

It is with very deep regret that I have to inform you on behalf of the Minister for the Army, that telegraphic advice has just been received which states that your Son, QX10858 Sapper Clive Birdwood FLEWELL-SMITH, Died of Illness whilst Prisoner of War in Ambon on 9th June, 1945, cause stated to be - Beri-Beri.

Realising the shock and grief this announcement will cause you, it is thought preferable to advise you by letter rather than by telegraphic means, and that some explanation is due concerning the receipt of information in respect of Prisoners of War.

Despite repeated representations by the Commonwealth Government to the Japanese Government at Tokyo through neutral sources, it has failed to comply with the terms of the Geneva Convention, one of which provides for the prompt interchange of information regarding Prisoners of War.

It is only during recent months that the Japanese have cabled information to International Red Cross, Geneva, concerning Prisoners of War in certain Camps, and it can only be assumed from the date of death as reported in the cable now to hand, that Japanese broadcast messages, capture cards and earlier particulars furnished to the Geneva Convention have been in the possession of the Japanese some considerable time before being released.

It will no doubt be readily understood that the only method of communication with Japan prior to the cessation of hostilities was through the International Red Cross. Owing, however, to the reluctance of the Japanese to furnish information to the powers who were at war with them, the Commonwealth Government had no means of ascertaining just how long particulars in respect of members of the Australian Military Forces were held at Tokyo before release.

With the profound sympathy of the Minister for the Army,

Yours faithfully,

*[Signature]*  
Lt.Col.,  
Officer-in-Charge, Queensland Echelon and Records.



## Three Letters from Clive



**Left:** Clive.  
*[Joy Burns, J50, 1940]*



Winnellie<sup>1</sup>  
25.8.1941

DEAR DAWN – I am afraid you will be disappointed in this letter as there isn't much to write about up here. And I can't – or had better not – put in what Ned does, eh?

Our section was on the range today and I got 84 out of a possible of 100, about fourth highest. All except two out of the 20 rounds were bulls-eyes and inners.

I suppose Ned told you all about Darwin. No one here in our company likes the place. When one joins up to fight, one gets tired of being, instead, cheap labour for Menzies. We will be glad when we leave. Our officers don't tell us anything, and we don't know how much longer we have to stay up here. Perhaps they don't know anything; that's probable too.

We expect to come back to Queensland for leave before going overseas – that's if we ever do go over – but for all we know we might be sent over from here. So long as we get into action we won't worry about leave.

Well, hoping this finds you as well as it leaves me.

*I remain  
yours affectionately  
CLIVE*

Winnellie  
6.10.1941

DEAR DAWN – I received your welcome letter last Friday. There is no doubt about the boys up here being restless. As far as coming back to Queensland, well, most of the boys say, and think, that we will be back before Xmas. However, we haven't been told anything yet, so it might be like the last time, a false alarm.

You must have been working since going back to the farm, eh, losing all that weight. And about that buster off your horse: well, they say you can't ride until you've had at least a dozen, so you've got a long way to go yet. Wait until you've had as many as me.

You write about me having learnt a lot since coming up here. About all I've learnt is how to dodge work and I am getting fairly good at it, too.

I haven't had a letter from Ned for quite a while, but as Mum sends me all the ones she gets from him, I get all the news that's going.

I received a present from the Major last week – 14 days CB. I told a Corporal off, and being a nice chap, of course, he put me on a yellow peril, a crime sheet. The 14 days will be over before we leave, even if we leave as soon as the earliest rumour says. There are about 10 rumours, all different dates, so one of them should be right.

Cheerio for the present.

*I remain  
yours sincerely  
CLIVE*

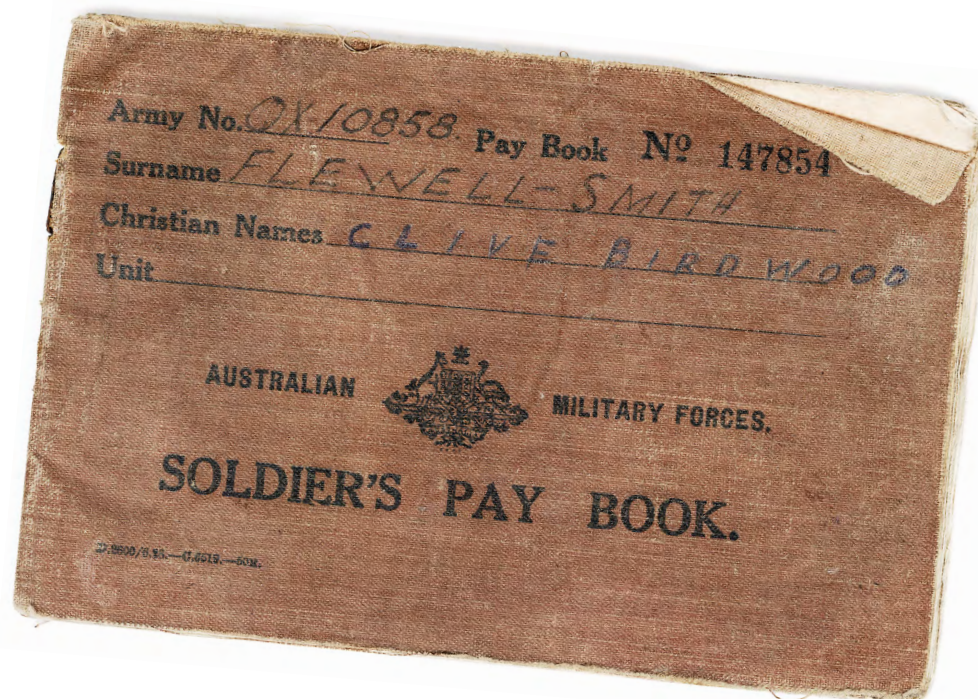
Winnellie  
14.11.1941

DEAR DAWN – Well, I received your welcome letter, and I am still in Darwin worse luck. All letters are censored now to stop us telling when we leave for home and how many are leaving. Some of our company have left already, but I don't know when it will be my turn.

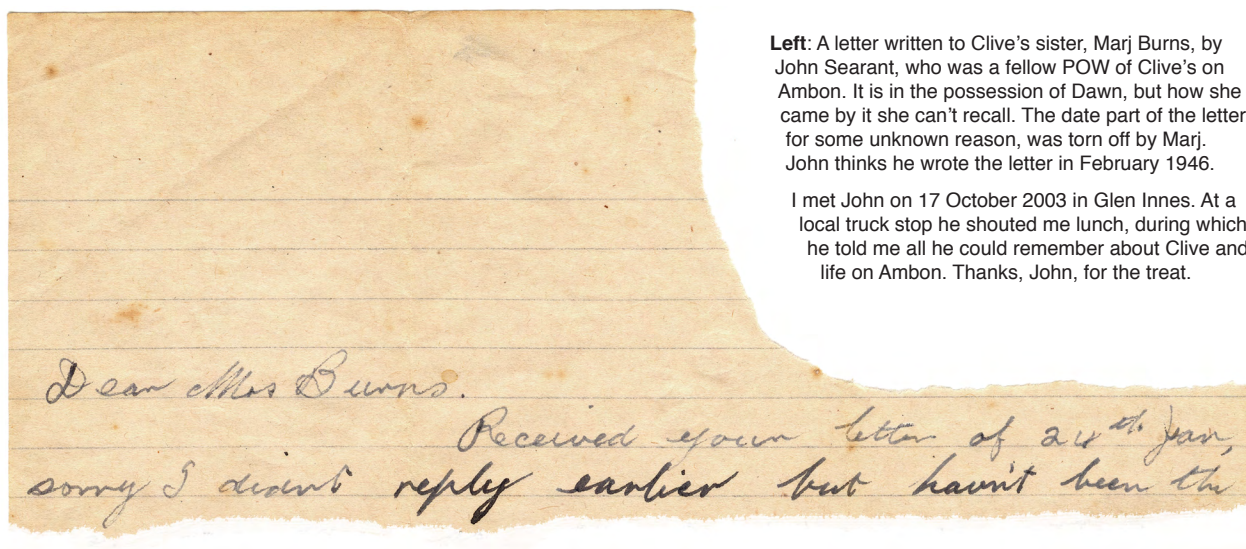
I received a letter from Mrs Allen last week (I used to stop there a lot before joining up) and she sent me an honour roll from Wondai of all the chaps who have enlisted. There are 120 from the Wondai shire and Ned's and my name are on it. Only one is listed as killed in action – George Burns (Max's brother). Two others have been wounded, Derby Armstrong and Don Cecil, two chaps that I played football with. Don is in the 2/15th. I asked Ned to find out if Don is badly wounded, but I haven't received an answer yet. Even if there are a few more wounded than those I know of, it isn't many out of 120 men. Let's hope the good luck holds out, eh?

Well, news is as scarce as ever, so I say cheerio. Hoping to see you during the early New Year.

*I remain  
your sincerely  
Clive*



1. Winnellie was a military camp just south of the RAAF airfield at Darwin.



**Left:** A letter written to Clive's sister, Marj Burns, by John Searant, who was a fellow POW of Clive's on Ambon. It is in the possession of Dawn, but how she came by it she can't recall. The date part of the letter, for some unknown reason, was torn off by Marj. John thinks he wrote the letter in February 1946.

I met John on 17 October 2003 in Glen Innes. At a local truck stop he shouted me lunch, during which he told me all he could remember about Clive and life on Ambon. Thanks, John, for the treat.

best for the past few weeks. I was rather expecting you to write, as the little information I have may be a help to you.

It wasn't until the latter part of 1944 that I came to know Clive well. He was working in the camp with the engineers doing maintenance work for the Japs. Fortunately, he missed most of the heavy working parties such as coaling, road work and tunnelling.

From the time we were captured until 1944 Clive suffered terribly from malaria and dry berri berri. In the latter part of that year he seemed to improve a little, but about that time the Japs were feeling the pinch, so all camp jobs were cancelled and everyone was working out of camp. The Japs wanted to finish their defences and every available man was put to work. It was a bad period for us. Our men were dying at the rate of 90 a month from dysentery.

It was whilst working on a job that we called "san ju tai traps" that I came to know Clive. We were in the same team. On this job we were forced to work in water up to our arm pits. We were endeavouring to drive in piles to reinforce the sides so that water couldn't undermine the banks.

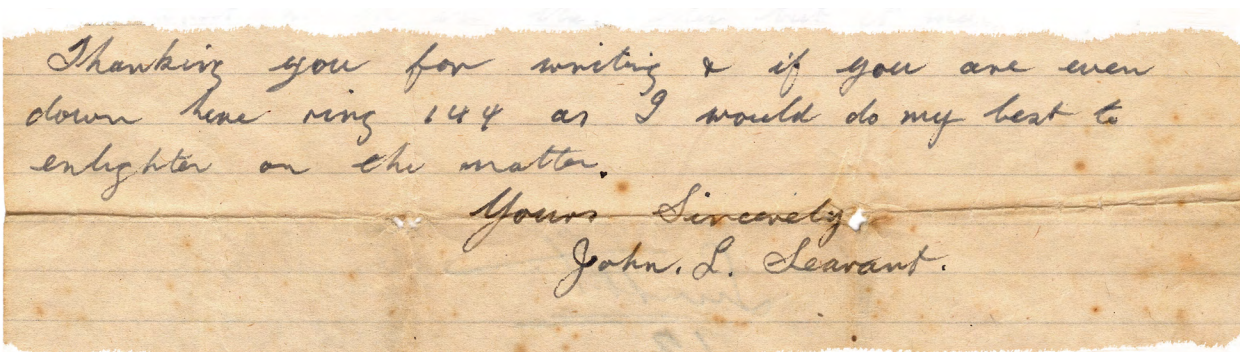
Clive was on this job for about five months until he caught dengue fever and was sent to hospital. He stayed there until he passed away. He lost the use of his legs and was confined to bed, but was quite cheerful throughout the ordeal.

To my knowledge, Clive never mentioned his family. I often wish he had. As far as I know he left no message, but then I couldn't be sure as I was away when he died. If it would be any help to you I will try and contact our CO, Lieut Van Mooten, who is in Melbourne. If there was a message or any papers he should know, because he handled everything like that.

There were quite a few boys from Clive's unit living in Brisbane. It surprises me that they haven't written to you before this. I will most likely be in Brisbane towards the end of May, and if that is suitable and if it would help you any, I could pop in and see you. I could give you some idea of conditions in the camp. From that you may be able to get an idea of what Clive had to put up with.

The whole time Clive was a POW he didn't receive any mail. One bag of mail came in December 1942, but was not distributed until August 1944. And then only officers and NCOs were issued with it because Privates and others were considered coolies, according to the Japs.

I am afraid there isn't much in this letter, but it may help.





493/19  
 QX 10858  
 Beaconsfield Leam  
 Brighton 12  
 Sandgate  
 6. 3. 46

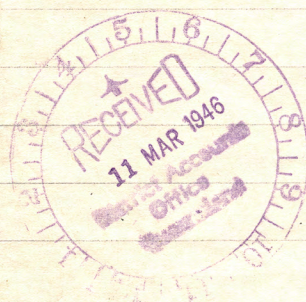
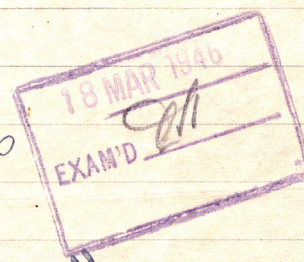
Dear Sir,  
 Will you please send me papers, I wish to apply for  
 Gratuity of Sapper C. B. Flewell Smith  
 2/11 Field Coy R.A.E.  
 Gull Force died in POW Camp Ambon 9.6.45.  
 (A.I.F.)

+ Obley  
 Yours sincerely  
 (Mrs) L. I. Flewell Smith (Mother)

W.P.

W.P. 2 p.w. 15/3/46

Answer  
 all by 10/10



**Right:** Letter sent by Clive's mother, Lou, to the army, regarding payment of a war gratuity.

Will you please send me papers, I wish to apply for Gratuity of

Sapper C. B. Flewell-Smith  
 2/11 Field Coy R.A.E.  
 Gull Force

died in POW Camp Ambon  
 9.6.1945...

The correspondence is continued on the following pages.



PHONES  
B 1691, B 2375

# AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES

EXT.5

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE

WG/QX10858

DISTRICT ACCOUNTS OFFICE

ANN STREET

BRISBANE

15 JAN 1947

Dear Sir,

Re: QX10858 FLEWELL-SMITH, C.B. (Dec'd)

A claim for immediate payment of War Gratuity in respect of the service of her deceased son has been received from Mrs. Louisa I. Flewell-Smith of Beaconsfield Tce, Brighton, Sandgate.

In order to assist this office in establishing whether or not the claimant is entitled to receive consideration of such action, will you please ascertain and verify where possible, the information necessary for the completion of the attached form D.A.11, and also verification of the ages of the claimant and her husband.

Your co-operation in this matter will be appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Encl.1

Officer-in- Charge  
Police Station  
SANDGATE. Q.

*G. H. Ranney*  
War Gratuity Officer.

Constable

*Ther. Jenkins*  
Supdt. No. 2249

17 JAN 1946



**Opposite:** In late 1946 Lou wrote to the army requesting payment of a war gratuity for the death of her son Clive while a POW. In response, on 15 January 1947, the army wrote to the officer-in-charge at the nearest police station (Sandgate) asking him to conduct an interview with Lou and her husband to verify certain facts.  
[C06, 1947]

**Below:** On 25 February 1947, responding to a letter the army sent her on 15 January (not reproduced here), Lou again wrote to the army asking for early payment of the gratuity:

*"In answer to your letter of Jan 15th, I wish to make application for early payment of my son's War Gratuity, as I am in need of it for medical attention. I would have answered sooner, but Police Officer called for information, and said that was all that was necessary for me to do..."*

It is not known when the gratuity was finally paid, or the amount of payment.

[C05, 1947]



**Above:** "Ambon", Beaconsfield Terrace, Brighton (northern suburbs of Brisbane) where Clive's parents, William & Lou, lived after the war. It was named in memory of where Clive died as a POW. The nameplate is at the top of the steps, to the right of the bottom rail.  
[Joy Burns, J44, ca 1950]

Re Qx 10858. Levelle Smith CB

Dear Sirs

In answer to your letter of Jan 15<sup>th</sup>, I wish to make application for early payment of my son's war gratuity, as I am in need of it for medical attention. I would have answered sooner, but Police Officer called for information, and said that was all that was necessary for me to do

Thanking you in Anticipation

Yours sincerely  
(Mrs) L. I. Levelle-Smith.

"Ambon" 32.  
Beaconsfield Terrace  
Brighton  
Sandgate  
25.2.47  
2/332/8



# Ned at El Alamein

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf Bn, AIF Abroad  
Tuesday, 11 August 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Dawn Precious, no letters from you since writing my last one to you, and I'm feeling quite blue about it. Of course, Darling, I could get one from you every day and still wouldn't be satisfied. I would want two then.

Well, dearest Love, there's not much to tell you from here. You know where I am (not with the boys), and nothing exciting happens. Just at present here I'm bossing a few Wogs about (native labourers) and seeing that they do the work rightly. It would amuse you to see me at it. With the little English they know and the less Arabic that I know, it's a bit of a tangle at times, but we manage to get along okay.

I went on leave a couple of nights ago to see the ENSA<sup>1</sup> Revue. It's an English show and well worth going to see, especially the singing and dancing. Otherwise, Dearest, there's nothing of interest to tell you. We have a few beers now and again. It's the only thing we can do here to relieve our blues, so I hope you'll forgive me, Dear. I still remember my promise that I made to you, Sweetest.

Darling, I hope you received my letters explaining about the stripe and where I am. I'm wondering if the censor made a mess of it. I hope not.

Well, Darling, I just received some news, but I can't mention it here, worse luck.

Sweet Heart, there's no need to worry about me and any girls here. The nice ones don't talk to Aussies, and I don't talk to any others, so girls and I don't agree on this side of the world. You're okay on that score, eh, Dear.

I just got word – one of my mates has been wounded. Not badly, luckily for him. It's a coincidence that he was the first wounded in our platoon in Tobruk and the first again here.

One of the lads just brought down some fish for our breakfast. They caught them on the beach this afternoon. It will be the first fish I've tasted since the last couple of weeks in Tobruk, when we used to blow them up with Mill's bombs. They (the bombs) are lots better to use than gelly, and lots safer, but the taxpayer mightn't like it if they knew what we sometimes used their grenades for, eh.

By the way, did you receive my cables? I hope you got the birthday one on time.

Sweet Heart, I can see I'll have to hurry up and get back and make you fall in love with me again and cut out that friend of yours, eh, Dear.

I'll have to close now. There's a lot more I'd like to say, but it's no go. Cheerio, Sweet Heart. Lots of love.

*From your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*

1. ENSA, the Entertainments National Service Association, was formed in 1939 in Britain. Its performers, all civilians, spent five years entertaining Allied troops throughout Europe, Africa and the Middle East until it was wound up at war's end.

## FLIES, SLEEP & UNBURIED DEAD

Edited extract, *Official History*: vol 3, 616

THE DAY on which the 2/15th went to the El Alamein front, 3rd August, its commander laid down a policy of aggression: the enemy was to be fired on whenever seen, and harassed by patrols and raids.

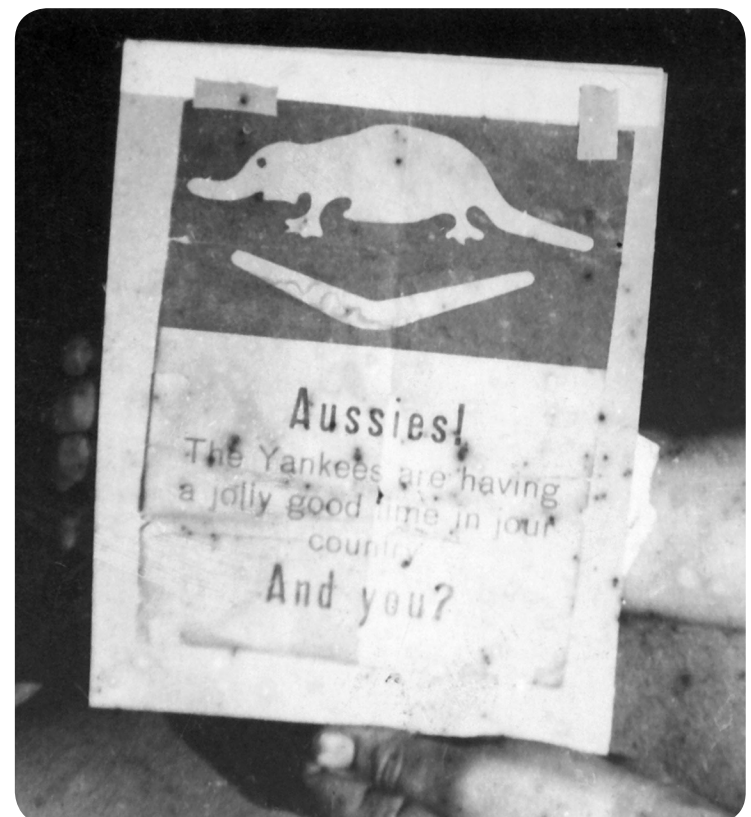
By night, the men slept in broken watches, each taking his turn to keep guard or patrol the wire; in addition, one night's sleep in three was lost on patrolling. By day, sleep was driven away by the heat, the intermittent shelling, and the ubiquitous flies.

The flies! It was midsummer and unburied dead still lay on the battlefield. On the 9th, the flies were so bad that the midday meal was dispensed with. Thereafter, a policy of burying and cleaning up was adopted and within a fortnight the fly menace was under control.

**Below:** On 22nd August the Germans scattered leaflets over the area at El Alamein occupied by the Australian 9th Division. They measured 6 x 8 inches and were headed with the divisional insignia – a platypus over a boomerang. It read: "Aussies! The Yankees are having a jolly good time in your country. And you?" The leaflet was eagerly collected for sale to others, as a memento, or to post home.  
(Edited extract, *Official History*: vol 3, 621)

[Hank Newton, NH05, August 1942]

**Opposite:** Knocked out German tank, El Alamein.  
[Hank Newton, NH03, 1942]





*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Tuesday, 25 August 1942*

TO MY DEAREST BELOVED FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, no word from you for quite some time now. I received a couple of letters from Mum last mail day, but was very disappointed at not receiving any from you. I know it's not your fault, Sweet, so don't think I'm blaming you, will you.

Well, Darling, I'm back with the boys again<sup>1</sup> and am writing this in my doover, amongst the dust, heat and flies. I'm feeling pretty dirty just at present, too.

It's fairly quiet here just now. A few planes about, but mostly ours. We're certainly giving him (Jerry) plenty to think about with the shelling and bombing he's getting. It feels good to see it dished out to him like we used to cop it in Tobruk. All the same, I wish to hell we could fight somewhere else instead of this damn desert.

Well, Sweet Heart, I certainly miss my daily swim. We only get one every three or four days now, and we're just as dirty as ever when we get back to our post. At present we're digging a new position. For that matter, we're always digging. No wonder the 1st AIF got the name of Diggers if they did as much of it as we do.

There's not much news to tell you, Dearest. I'm okay and in pretty good health and just longing for the day I arrive home and hold you in my arms again. It still seems a long way off, worse luck.

I suppose you have heard of Churchill's visit<sup>2</sup>. I didn't see him, not that any of us wanted to, but from what one hears he didn't get too good a welcome from our lads.

Well, Love, I'm just about stuck for news. Give my regards to all and wish them the best. All my love, dearest Sweet Heart.

*From yours ever truly  
Love NED*

P.S. By the way, Dearest, we've been told we're going into an attack<sup>3</sup> so I'm hoping for the best. Of course, you'll know long before you get this letter if anything happens to me – which I'm hoping not – but remember me kindly, Sweet, won't you, and don't take it too hard if I do go out.

Well, Sweet Heart, I'll say cheerio. I love you more than anything else in the world. So long, Sweet. Again, lots of love and kisses.

*From yours ever  
NED*

1. Ned was taken out of the LOB group and rejoined his section in preparation for Operation Bulimba on 1 September.
2. Churchill visited the 9th Division on 4 August.
3. Operation Bulimba.



# Operation Bulimba

Edited extracts, *Official History*: vol 3, 546-634

ROMMEL'S ARMY, after taking Mersa Matruh, pressed on towards the last British defences west of the Nile – a 30-mile neck of desert between the sea near El Alamein and the Qattara Depression. Troops allotted to its defence had been digging, wiring and laying mines for some days, while past them poured the retreating British army.

El Alamein was an insignificant railway station near the coast. North of the railway line the main road travelled along a low rise which lay between the railway and the narrow strip of salt marsh and sand dunes bordering the sea. To the immediate south the only noteworthy features emerging from the sandy desert were several stony ridges, one of which, Alam el Halfa, was the site where Rommel's advance into Egypt was checked and, ultimately, turned. South of Alam el Halfa the desert floor became rougher, broken by sharp-edged escarpments which defined the southern border of the area on which the Eighth Army had chosen to stand. Further south lay the waterlogged Qattara Depression, covered with a sun-baked sand crust, and beyond that stretched the soft and shifting sands of the Sahara.

Although General Auchinleck hoped to halt Rommel's advance at El Alamein, he was also determined to keep his army intact. If the El Alamein area was lost he would fight farther back on the Nile delta. If this was lost he would fight on the Suez Canal with part of his force, while part withdrew along the Nile. Plans were prudently made for such operations. The spirit in which Auchinleck prepared to confront Rommel at El Alamein, however, was not downcast, even though he made plans in case of failure. On the contrary, he judged that Rommel might overreach himself and thereby the opportunity arise not merely to halt him, but to throw him back. Indeed, all was not well on Rommel's side. As he moved towards El Alamein on the 30th June he had only 1700 first-line infantry and 55 tanks forward. He was perilously short of supplies and largely dependent on what he had captured during the advance from Tobruk. On the other hand, Rommel knew that his enemy was receiving men and weapons in large numbers.

The British commanders expected Rommel to attack on 1 July. The tired Axis forces attacked as anticipated on the 1st, making little headway due to heavy going, a dust storm, and a powerful RAF strike. Soon the Afrika Korps had only 37 tanks in running order out of 55 that had opened the battle. Next morning the Germans resumed their attack at first light in compliance with Rommel's orders, but the troops had lost heart and no real assault was made. The two opposing forces fought each other inconclusively until nightfall.

Next day, 3rd July, marked the end of Rommel's first attempt to hustle the Eighth Army back from El Alamein before it could settle in. That night Rommel realised that he had driven his staunch but dwindling forces to a standstill and decided to discontinue his attack for at least a fortnight.

On the British side, Auchinleck retained sufficient strength to take the initiative, but his efforts to exhaust Rommel's forces during the remainder of July succeeded only in exhausting his own forces, and he failed to dislodge Rommel's army. For more than a month afterwards neither of the opposing armies launched a major attack. Neither was strong enough.

Rommel, commenting later, said of the situation:

It was now certain that we could continue to hold our front. Although the British losses in this Alamein fighting had been higher than ours, the price to Auchinleck had not been excessive; for the one thing that had mattered to him was to halt our advance, and that, unfortunately, he had done.

Auchinleck knew it would be necessary to pause and build-up greater strength before attacking again. In the last days of July and first days of August, though he was cautious, his confidence was not undermined. His army had stopped the enemy, it had thrown Rommel on the defensive, and the long ebb of British military fortune had ceased. The flow the other way was not yet discernible, but the tide had turned.

On the afternoon of 27th July a comprehensive appraisal of the situation was placed before Auchinleck. It stated that Rommel's forces were not strong enough to attempt the conquest of Egypt "except as a gamble and under very strong air cover". As for the Allies, none of its units were, as yet, sufficiently well-trained for offensive operations. The army's best course for the present was to combine a defensive policy with raids and other offensive gestures. Eventually – perhaps in mid-September – the army would be able to renew the attack and achieve a breakthrough at El Alamein. Auchinleck accepted the proposals.

## AUCHINLECK IS REPLACED

Despite Auchinleck's success in halting Rommel, Churchill was impatient. Auchinleck was proposing to wait until mid-September before mounting another offensive, and this delay seems to have been the main factor prompting Churchill's decision to remove him from overall command of operations in the Middle East. Yet the successor Churchill chose soon came to the same conclusion as Auchinleck, and eventually decided that the offensive should not be resumed until late October.

Churchill replaced Auchinleck with Alexander on 8 August, and appointed Montgomery as commander of the British Eighth Army (which included the Australian 9th Division). Two days later Churchill handed Alexander a handwritten directive:

1. Your prime and main duty will be to take or destroy at the earliest opportunity the German-Italian Army commanded by Field Marshal Rommel together with all its supplies and establishments in Egypt and Libya.
2. You will discharge, or cause to be discharged, such other duties as pertain to your command without prejudice to the task described in paragraph 1, which must be considered paramount in His Majesty's interests.

The Eighth Army inherited by Alexander had become disheartened at its lack of progress in evicting Rommel from El Alamein. Alexander's first step in restoring morale was "to lay down the firm principle, to be made known to all ranks, that no further withdrawal was contemplated and that we would fight the coming battle on the ground on which we



stood". Montgomery, acting on these instructions, had the desired effect on the Eighth Army, giving it revived hope and a new confidence. With an orator's instinct – not with rhetoric, but with determined words followed up by action that showed he meant what he said – he told his army the things it wanted to hear: that it would fight where it stood and that any further withdrawal was out of the question; that it would attack again when ready (but not before); and that tactical methods which had failed (relying on small improvised battle groups instead of battalion strength) would be discarded. No army was ever more confident, none ever had a higher morale, than the Eighth Army when it next attacked at El Alamein.

### ROMMEL'S OPTIONS

There were three courses open to Rommel after the Allied offenses in July had failed. He could disengage to entice the British from their fixed defences, and revert to a battle of tanks in which his formations excelled; he could try once more to attack El Alamein if only he could build-up the requisite strength; or he could settle down to defend his El Alamein position, a course that could offer no prosperous outcome.

On 19th August Rommel chose the second option and told his subordinates that he would probably attack in the moonlit period at the end of the month. Moonlight was needed for the armour to make the initial penetration by night. Three days later he issued the preliminary orders. It was an ambitious plan which required the Afrika Korps to travel 7 miles towards Alam el Halfa in the moonlight of early morning on 31 August through minefields of unknown extent.

British staff were expecting the attack. As a counter-stroke (to draw off some of Rommel's forces from Alam el Halfa and thus weaken his thrust) it was decided that a simultaneous raid would be made on the enemy's vulnerable supply route – the coast road. This was to be carried out by the Australian 2/13th, 2/15th and 2/17th battalions and was called Operation Bulimba (named after the Queensland beer).

### ALAM EL HALFA

Rommel hoped to achieve surprise, but the RAF was watching the movement of his armour. At dusk on the 30th, Rommel's tanks gathering for the offensive were bombed from the air. This was only the first of a series of tribulations for the German tanks, which were delayed by bad going, unexpected minefields and renewed air bombardment. When Rommel arrived forward at 9 a.m. he postponed the infantry assault until midday (originally planned for 6 a.m.) to allow time for refuelling his tanks. The infantry, when it did attack, was hit hard by British guns and tanks, and by day's end had bogged down. When night fell the RAF lit up the desert with flares and bombed the enemy's vehicles. Clouds of smoke rose from petrol fires and burning vehicles.

On the 1st September the tanks of the Afrika Korps were under constant bombardment from guns and aircraft. The position became so serious that Rommel had to break off the offensive, and over the next few days he withdrew his forces into defended positions.

In their attack on Alam El Halfa the Germans lost 1859 killed, wounded or missing, and the Italians 1051. Forty-nine tanks were destroyed. The British lost 1750 killed, wounded or missing and 67 tanks. Alam el Halfa was the turning point of the desert war; the first of the long series of defeats on every front which foreshadowed the collapse of Germany.

### OPERATION BULIMBA

The Australian 9th Division's diversionary raid, Operation Bulimba, was launched just before dawn on 1 September. The 2/15th Battalion (led by Lieut Colonel Ogle) conducted the raid, assisted by a squadron of tanks and elaborate artillery and air support. In the first phase, the battalion was to seize and hold, at dawn, certain enemy defences. Zero hour was fixed at 5.35 a.m. so that the leading infantry and engineers would reach the minefield at first light. The initial infantry advance was to be silent. Artillery bombardment was to open 15 minutes later, and stop at around the same time that the infantry reached the minefield.

At 5.15 a.m. the infantry of the 2/15 were out of their trucks and quietly forming up at the start line, 2500 yards from the objectives. Two companies moved off in a 600-yard front and reached the outer wire of the enemy's minefield just before the artillery fire stopped. Captain Bode's 'C' company, on the right, came under enemy fire, but pressed on until pinned down. By 8.40 a.m. nothing was known of 'C' company except that it had been under heavy fire and had reported earlier that it was running out of ammunition. On the left, Captain Snell's 'D' Company<sup>1</sup> was more fortunate, taking 39 prisoners and estimating that they had killed about 100. Their own losses were two officers and 35 others. With such losses, and the uncertainty of 'C' Company's situation, the gains could not be assured against a possible counter-attack. At 9.00 a.m. the battalion was ordered to withdraw.

The result of Operation Bulimba was at least 150 Germans killed and 140 captured. The 2/15th lost 39 killed, 109 wounded and 25 missing. In a cabled report to Australia, the battalion's commander described the outcome:

Although the operation did not achieve all that was hoped, it was no doubt a solid blow to the local enemy. Our troops fought with the greatest bravery. No man left the engagement before the order to withdraw, and their battle discipline and determination were of a high order.

Operation Bulimba was the first planned attack on a battalion scale against German troops on their now strongly fortified El Alamein line. It showed that troops could drive the Germans from their defences, but that a penetration on a narrow front by a single battalion could not be held: the gaps made in the minefields were too narrow, the counter-fire too strong, and the bridgehead could not be kept open.

However, the efforts of the 2/15th Battalion were not in vain, for the knowledge gained and the lessons learnt were utilised when the next attack was planned.



1. Ned took part in the 'D' Company's attack. He returned unscathed.

# Our Chance... Irretrievably Lost

Edited extracts, *The Rommel Papers*: 243-280



MY PANZER ARMY had now been five weeks in battle<sup>1</sup> against superior British forces. For four of those weeks the fighting had raged backwards and forwards in the foreground of Tobruk. We had succeeded in wearing down the British forces partly by attacks with limited objectives, and partly in defence.

After the fall of Knightsbridge and Gazala, we had stormed Tobruk. The British had retired first to Mersa Matruh and then to El Alamein. This series of engagements had brought the strength of my army to the point of exhaustion. With our reserves of material, including the immediately usable booty, beginning to run out, it was only the men's amazing spirit and will to victory that kept them going at all.

Not only had no replacement material arrived, but, with an almost unbelievable lack of appreciation of the situation, the supply authorities had actually sent only 3000 tons to Africa during June as compared with our real requirement of 60,000 tons (a figure which was never in fact attained). Captured stores had certainly helped to tide us over the expected crisis in our supply situation after the fall of Tobruk, but it was urgently necessary that this should have been followed up by adequate supplies from our own sources. Until this time, my staff and I had been just about able to manage, largely by drawing on the abundance of material we had captured. Enemy vehicles, for instance, made up 85% of our transport.

In Rome one excuse after the other was found for the failure of the supply organisation which was supposed to maintain my army. It was easy enough back there to say "It can't be done", for life and death did not depend on finding a solution. If everybody had pulled together in a resolute search for ways and means, and the staff work had been done in the same spirit, the technical difficulties could, without any doubt, have been overcome. When it is remembered that supplies decide the battle in modern warfare, it is easy to see how the clouds of disaster were gathering for my army.

The British, on the other hand, were sparing no effort to master the situation. They organised the move of fresh troops into the Alamein line with admirable speed. Their leading men had clearly realised that the next battle in Africa would determine the situation for a long time to come, and were looking at things very cool-headedly. The peril of the hour moved the British to tremendous exertions, just as always in a moment of extreme danger things can be done which had previously been thought impossible. Mortal danger is an effective antidote for fixed ideas.

My troops had given of their best, but it had repeatedly been the superiority of certain German weapons over the British equivalents that had been our salvation. Now there were signs, in the new British tanks and antitank guns, of a coming qualitative superiority of British material. If this were achieved, it would clearly mean the end for us.

For that reason alone, therefore, it was essential to do everything possible to bring about a British collapse in Africa before any considerable shipments of arms could arrive from Britain or the United States.

*3 July 1942*

Dearest Lu – One loses all idea of time here. The struggle for this position (only 60 miles from Alexandria) is hard. I've been up in the front area for a few days, living in the car or a hole in the ground. The

enemy air force gave us a bad time. However, I hope to manage it. Heartfelt thanks for your many dear letters.

*4 July 1942*

Dearest Lu – Unfortunately, things are not going as I should like them. Resistance is too great and our strength exhausted. However, I still hope to find a way to achieve our goal. I'm rather tired and fagged out.

## RIGID, STATIC WARFARE

Our great campaign of the summer had begun with a fantastic victory, but after the capture of Tobruk the immense strength of the British Empire had begun to tell again. There had only been a few days in early July during which we could have hoped to conquer Alamein and take the Suez area. Whereas we, on our side, had had to fight every new action with the same formations, the British had been able to take their battered divisions out of the line for refitting, and to throw in fresh formations fully equipped and up to full battle strength. My troop numbers had grown continually smaller under steadily increasing losses from dead, wounded and sick. Again and again it had been the same battalions, carried for the most part in captured vehicles, who had driven up to the British line, leapt from their lorries, and stormed through the sand up to the enemy. Again and again, it had been the same tank crews who had ridden their tanks into battle and the same gunners who had pushed their guns into position. The deeds performed in these weeks by both officers and men had reached the limit of human endurance.

I made tremendous demands on my forces, and spared neither the men, the officers, nor myself. I knew that the fall of Tobruk and the collapse of the Eighth Army was the one moment in the African war when the road to Alexandria lay open and virtually undefended, and my staff and I would have been fools not to have gone all out to seize this unique opportunity. If success had depended, as in times gone by, on the strength of will of my men and their officers, we would have overrun Alamein. But our sources of supply had dried up – thanks to the idleness and muddle of the supply authorities in Europe.

During the march to El Alamein, I wanted above all else to avoid another mutual build-up of material taking place on any line west of Alexandria. I had not wanted the British to have another chance of re-equipping, for I knew very well that we would then have an enemy to tackle whose material superiority would have been even greater than it had been previously, and who would also have learnt from his defeats during the summer. But the main thing I wanted to avoid was the war settling down at El Alamein into mechanised static warfare with a stabilised front, because this was just what the British officers and men had been trained for. The good points of the British soldier (his tenacity, for instance) would have the maximum effect, and the bad points (such as his immobility and rigidity) none at all.

But we had failed in these intentions and the future did not look very bright. We had, of course, dealt the British severe losses. Between the 26th of May and the 20th of July, 60,000 British, South African, Indian,

1. Rommel is writing of the first week in July 1942.



New Zealand, French and Australian troops had found their way into our prisoner-of-war camps. My men had destroyed well over 2000 British tanks and armoured vehicles. The equipment of an entire army lay destroyed in the desert, and thousands upon thousands of their vehicles were now being used by my troops. But our losses had also been heavy. On the German side alone, 2300 officers and men had been killed, 7500 wounded, and 2700 taken prisoner. Of the Italian forces, over 1000 officers and men had been killed, more than 10,000 wounded and some 5000 taken prisoner. Needless to say, the losses of material had also been very considerable.

And so there followed during July a series of violent and bloody battles in front of El Alamein, the main feature of which was continuous round-the-clock bombing by the RAF.

The Alamein line abutted the sea in the north, and in the south opened out into the Qattara Depression – a flat plain of loose sand studded with numerous salt marshes, completely impassable for motor vehicles. The line could not be turned, and as a result the war took on a form of which both sides possessed great experience and theoretical knowledge and in which neither could produce any revolutionary technique which would come as an innovation to the other. The front had grown static and the British Command was in its element, for infantry battle and static warfare was its strongest point. Local attacks carried forward under the protection of infantry tanks and artillery were a British speciality. In static warfare, victory goes to the side which can fire the more ammunition.

My endeavour at El Alamein had been to escape from this rigid, static warfare – in which the British were masters and for which their infantry and tank crews had been trained – and to gain the open desert in front of Alexandria where I could have exploited our definite tactical superiority in open desert warfare. But I had not succeeded. The British had brought my formations to a halt.

We did succeed in taking several fortified works of the Alamein line and advancing a few miles beyond them to the east. But there our attack stalled and our strength failed. We were met by greatly superior British armoured formations thrusting against our front. Our chance of overrunning the remainder of the Eighth Army and occupying Eastern Egypt was, by early July, irretrievably lost.

*17 July 1942*

Dearest Lu – Things are going downright badly for me at the moment, at any rate in the military sense. The enemy is using his superiority, especially in infantry, to destroy the Italian formations one by one, and the German formations are much too weak to stand alone. It's enough to make one weep.

## RACE TO REORGANISE

With the abandonment of our offensive plans in July, we finally had to give up all idea of fighting it out with the British at the Alamein line while their formations were still suffering from their great losses of the first summer battles. It had proved impossible to follow up our initial success to final victory, for the British commander was now in a position to press on at full speed with the replenishment and refitting of his beaten army. Day by

day, reinforcements and fresh formations were flowing to the Eighth Army; and the British troops, instead of being in flight before us, were once again firmly in the hands of their commander.

After the temporary cessation of our attack on the Alamein line and the successful repulse of the enemy's counter-attack, a relative calm set in over the front for the remainder of July and August. Thus after immense victories, our great summer campaign ended in a dangerous lull. Both sides sought to use the breathing space to refit their forces and bring up fresh troops. Once again we were in a race to reorganise.

If we had not captured the big British supply dumps we would not have been able to continue. Rations were miserable and so monotonous that we were sick of the sight of them. The petrol and ammunition situation was serious and we were having to exercise the strictest economy. We were frequently compelled to put a complete ban on all forms of harassing fire merely in order to save ammunition. The British, on the other hand, were able to exercise the full weight of their material superiority and hammered away with their artillery for hours on end at our troops, who were forced to endure frightful hardships in the heat and desolation of their positions. During the month of August, no effort should have been spared to provide an adequate build-up of petrol and ammunition on African soil, but this was not done.

The efforts of the Panzer Army were directed towards an early resumption of the offensive, for its success during the summer had, as expected, struck fear and dismay into the Allied camps in New York and London. It was therefore obvious that the Anglo-Americans would spare no effort to prevent a further advance by the Panzer Army to Alexandria. But their shipping from Britain or America required two to three months for the journey round the Cape to North Africa, and we therefore had a few weeks' grace before the immense reinforcements, which they had no doubt planned for the Eighth Army after the fall of Tobruk, could reach African soil. We reckoned on the beginning of September as the arrival date in Suez of the Eighth Army's cargo of the very latest weapons and war material from Britain and America. The balance of strength would then go so heavily against us that our chances of mounting an offensive would be gone for good. So we intended to strike first.

On the evening of the 1st September, after the commencement of our new offensive, the Panzer Army had only one petrol issue left; and one issue<sup>1</sup>, even with the greatest economy, could only suffice to keep our supply traffic going for a very short time. From 2300 hrs onwards, right into the morning of the 2nd September, we were attacked by relays of aircraft dropping bombs of all sizes. Some came crashing round my command post. A vehicle was set alight not 10 yards from my slit trench. After that night I decided to call off the attack. My reasons were the serious air situation and the disastrous state of our supplies. Our offensive no longer had any hope of success, partly because we had no petrol and insufficient fighter cover, and partly because the battle had now reached a stage where material strength alone would decide the issue. And in material strength the British were our masters.



1. An issue of petrol was equivalent to the quantity required to travel 100 kilometres over normally good going.

*Well, Sweet, I Was In It*

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Sunday, 13 September 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE DAWN – Well, Precious, a letter from you at last and a very loving one, too. Gee, Darling, I was pleased to get it. It seems like months since the last one I got. The mail arrives here just anyhow now. I received one from Mother three weeks ago dated the 1st of July. Yours, and also one from Mum that I received only a few of days ago were dated the 7th June. A bit mixed up, eh, Dear. But as long as I get them that's all that matters, isn't it.

I hope, Darling, you have been getting my cablegrams. I received one from Mother last night wishing me all the best. It should have come a fortnight earlier when it looked as if I would need it<sup>1</sup>.

I suppose you've read all about the raid a Queensland battalion put on at El Alamein on September 1st, eh. Well, Sweet, I was in it, but I was one of the lucky ones and hardly got a scratch. It was a bit hectic for a while, but the boys went forward in fine state. I lost a lot of my coppers, but that's the chance we all take.

Well, Sweet Heart, I won't bore you with the details, so I'll change the story a little. Jerry's been a little busy with a few Stukas doing some bombing. Five raids today, not directed at us luckily. I've got a German machine gun here, a Spandau, and I give his planes a few bursts when they go over. The only trouble is they won't come near enough for me to do much damage, if any at all.

Well, Love, how are things back there and how are you keeping? Okay I hope. I'm quite okay, but very thin. The boys reckon they can't see me when I'm standing side on to them. I guess that's why Jerry couldn't hit me the other morning, though he went close enough.

Well, my Love, things don't look too hopeful of our returning now, do they. Curtin says he's going to reinforce us over here, so you'll have to wait another two years. Do you feel like waiting. You'll be 22 then, won't you Sweet, and I'll be 24. Getting quite ancient, eh. For that matter I feel that way now, and if I stay here two more years I'll be either grey or baldy.

They are giving the boys leave: four days in Alexandria and Cairo. It's just starting, but at the rate they're sending us I'll have mine for my 23rd birthday. It would make one weep tears of blood wouldn't it, but we are still hopeful of something better when we move behind the lines again.

By the way, Sweet Heart, they're publishing a photo of a Soldier's Best Girl in the *AIF News* each week now. How would you like to have yours published? Of course, I mightn't have courage enough to send it in, but you never know, eh.

I have to close for the night, Sweet Heart, as it's getting too dark. Cheerio, Dawn and God bless you.

WELL, DARLING, here I'm back again. Jerry seems peeved this morning. He's been shelling a bit more than usual and has been landing them a little too close for comfort. Only one air raid today. Nothing much (no damage) and only about four planes, but very close to our position. He's certainly livened things up around here, damn him. Our planes caught some of his Stukas going home last night and made a bit of a mess, so I suppose he's taking his spite out on us now.

I'm camped not far off the beach so I still get my swim, though the water is getting cold now. I saw Clem Goodwin a couple of days ago. He looks just the same as ever and is okay.

Precious, you want to know if I've been drunk over here and if I've started gambling. Well, Darling, as far as beer goes, I suppose I've done my share of drinking. A half dozen of us often have a party when we are out of the line. But as for gambling, no, I haven't started that yet, nor am I likely to. As for being too old when I get home for what you mentioned, Sweetest, I hardly think so<sup>2</sup>. And as for getting married – well, Dawn, I'd like to as soon as I get back, if you think the same of me as I do of you. I know everything has not turned out the best so far with us, but it'll be a different tale when I return. There'll be no need to be frightened of me, Sweet. I'm not tough and rough yet, even if I look and act like it here. I'm still the same old Ned you used to know, only with a lot more sense attached and a bit of understanding, too. To be truthful, I don't think so much of myself or think I'm the only one that matters.

Well, my Love, cheerio. All my love and kisses to you and keep your chin up.

*Your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*

1. Ned is saying that the letter from his mother wishing him all the best would have given him a lift if he had received it before going into Operation Bulimba on 1 September.

2. Ned means that he won't be too old to roger, although Dawn in her letter would have phrased it more delicately.



*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Sunday, 27 September 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Sweet, no letter from you for quite some time now, so I'm feeling slightly blue at present. I sent you and Mother each a cablegram yesterday, just to let you know I'm still kicking and okay. Hope you get it.

Well, Precious, there's not much news around here. It's very quiet. One can hear the arty laying down a barrage way in the distance, but we're having a bit of a rest at present and there's nothing doing.

Sweet Heart, I'm closing shop for a while. Maybe I'll think of something interesting in the meantime, eh.

WELL, PRECIOUS, here I am again and I'm a good little boy now, I hope. I've just come back from church parade. Think it will make me any better? Also, I have just had a hot shower and feel great. It's one of the best feelings in the world to feel clean again.

By the way, one of Jerry's planes came over last night and unloaded ½ dozen or so bombs near here. I woke up just in time to hear them coming down. Some of the lads were in the slit trenches, but it was a little late for me to try and get to one so I flattened out in my tent and hoped for the best. Anyway, they landed quite some distance from us, so things are still okay.

Well, Darling, how are all the folks? All okay I'm hoping. Also yourself, Sweet – still okay? I think I told you all the news in my last letter, Dawn, so you'll have to excuse the shortness of this note, and also the pencil as I've no pen just at present. I'm sending you a few *AIF News* shortly, so here's hoping they reach you.

Cheerio, my Love. Wishing you all the best and all my love and kisses.

*From your loving fiancé  
NED*

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Friday, 16 October 1942*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, still no letters from you. Have you been sick or have you just written me off like an old debt? I've received seven letters from Mother since your last and it's got me worried not hearing from you for so long. I've been waiting for word from you so as I could answer it, but none has arrived yet, to my sorrow.

Well, Dearest, things aren't so good here. There's a damn dust storm on and it's threatening to blow everything away – or bury it. I feel like jumping up and running amok with a rifle or something. The whole damn show's getting on my nerves.

DARLING, I started this yesterday and it started to rain so I had to knock off. Between the rain, sand and wind, all paying merry hell with my tent, I had to shift it into a better position. I managed it okay after a struggle and turning the air blue for nearly an hour. It's still blowing as hard as ever, but there's not much dust, mostly sand flying now. The rain steadied the dust up somewhat, thank the Lord.

Well, my Sweet, there's nothing much of any interest to tell you. Four men<sup>1</sup> of our company won decorations in that stunt of ours on September 1st: two DCMs, one MM and one MC. Not a bad effort, eh. I was quite pleased to get out of it with a full skin. If I can manage that okay I'll be satisfied without any medal, eh, Darling.

I'm camped right near the beach now, so I get plenty of swimming when not training. I've been a bit off colour the last couple of weeks. I had a touch of fever (desert) for the first time. It's not much, but it leaves one as weak as a chicken afterwards, which is really the worst part of it.

Well, Darling, I don't know quite what to make of not getting any letters from you. A lot of the boys have been, to put it crudely, "dumped" since we've come up to the desert this time. About 75%, and I'm just wondering if I'm to share their fate. I hope not, Sweet, but if so, don't hesitate, because I'd like to know how I stand. It looks as if I'll be over here another year at least, so if you don't want to wait I can't blame you. I can only blame myself for leaving when I did. Dearest, I'm hoping I'm wrong in what I'm thinking, because I do love you and want you to love me too and keep true, but that's in fate's hand, isn't it.

Dawn, I don't like getting letters from others and none from you. Tell me straight out, Sweet. Don't put off writing, because to know a thing's happened is lots better than not knowing and wondering about it. That's all I can say on the subject, Sweetest. If you think you've found someone better, well, let me know.

Well, Precious, I'll say cheerio now. I hope you can understand this. Wishing you all the best for Christmas and hoping you get those *AIF News* I sent. All my love and kisses, Darling.

*From yours ever  
NED*

1. Capt Len Snell, QX6226, Military Cross (MC)  
Cpl Horton McLachlan, QX5634, Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM)  
Pte Reg Bambling, QX6943, DCM  
Pte Andy Hogg, QX9589, Military Medal (MM)

# El Alamein

Edited extracts from *Official History: vol 3, 639-741*

AFTER AUGUST 1942 the Eighth Army rapidly gained strength. Between 1st August and 23rd October (when the Battle of El Alamein opened) 41,000 reinforcements joined the army and over 8700 vehicles were sent forward. The successful pursuit of the Axis (when it was eventually defeated) would require far more vehicles than had been available hitherto. They were now available. And the Eighth Army commanded a powerful superiority of tanks. 1029 were ready for battle and there were some 200 replacements standing by, and about 1000 in the workshops. The German armoured divisions, on the other hand, had only 218 serviceable tanks (and 21 under repair) and the Italian divisions 278 when the battle opened. More than 500 aircraft were available to support the army, whereas the Axis air forces could deploy only about 350.

The original intention to open the British offensive in September was revised after the battle of Alam el Halfa. Alexander and Montgomery had decided that it would be necessary to attack by night in order to penetrate the enemy's formidable defences – and a bright moon would be required to clear the minefields and deploy the armour. When the Alam el Halfa fighting had died down, the September full moon was only three weeks away. That was insufficient time to allow for the training, extensive preparations and detailed planning required for the kind of stage-managed, large-scale attack that Montgomery intended to launch. The army and tank corps must have sufficient time for training. The next full moon was on 24th October and, with Montgomery's agreement, Alexander chose the 23rd as the opening date of the offensive.

The immensity of the Eighth Army's onslaught, as it was successively disclosed to each command level in strict conformity with a carefully timed program, caught the imagination of the commanders and staff. Montgomery saw to that by personally making the exposition to commanders at various levels. The ground troops were also to have their imagination fired and their confidence excited to a high pitch when, in their turn, they were to be told by their commanders of an attack in the north by four infantry divisions; a similar attack in the south by the better part of two infantry divisions; two tank divisions to break through at dawn in the north and another one in the south. There would be a thousand tanks and as many again available to replace them. There would be an opening barrage, so they were told, by close on a thousand guns.

And so the plan was revealed to successive levels of command: to brigade commanders and senior engineer officers on 28th September; to battalion and unit commanders on 10th October; to company, battery and other sub-unit commanders on the 17th; to all officers on the 21st, two days before the battle; and to the men on that day and the next. Nobody was to be told of the plan in advance of the time prescribed for him to be told. From 21st October all leave was cancelled. The area occupied by the Eighth Army was then sealed off and nobody was allowed out.

As preparation in the 9th Division's area, 600 rounds per field gun were moved up by night, dug in and camouflaged. Petrol supplies amounting to 7500 tons had to be dumped forward. All captured German jerry cans were called in to ensure that the reserves of petrol would not suffer the losses through leakage invariably experienced with British containers. Diggings appeared, for no purpose evident at the time, that would become the headquarters of the formations during the battle. Other diggings were preparations for the casualty stations and medical services.

Provision was made for the evacuation of prisoners of war. Pipe-lines were extended and new water-points established. Utmost attention was given to concealment and deception. The intention to attack could not be hidden, but it was hoped that the day and the place could be kept secret. The aim of the cover plan was to create an illusion that the army would not be ready to attack until November and that the main attack would then be made in the south.

So far as possible, administrative and supply arrangements that could be watched by the enemy espionage network at Cairo and Alexandria were so arranged that wrong conclusions could be drawn, and clandestine plans were made for information to reach the enemy that the army would not be ready by October. Leave to Cairo and Alexandria for forward troops was instituted on a considerable scale and was continued till almost the eve of battle. The last troops offered leave were the LOB group – without their knowing they were to be left out of battle.

In case the stopping of contracts for fresh supplies might lead to an inference that an attack was about to be launched, such contracts were stopped early in October when no operations were pending, and from that time the whole army went on to hard rations. An air force bombing and strafing program similar to the one that was to precede the real offensive was carried out in September so that when it was repeated in October the enemy need attach no special significance to it. Infantry patrolling was kept general to ensure that no indication was given of a particular interest in any part of the front.

Nothing could prevent the enemy observing from the air the desert's changing face, or noting on its bare floor the assembly of hundreds of guns and tanks, and thousands of vehicles. The aim was not to disguise the fact that they were being assembled (rather it was advertised), but to hide their later movement when they would move into final position for battle.

Early in the planning each unit had to state the number of vehicles it would require for the attack. The assembly of all vehicles and tanks required was planned and then, to conceal the movement of the immense number of vehicles into assembly areas on the day before battle, the planners ordained that by 1st October the number and arrangement of vehicles on the floor of the desert should appear the same from the air as it would on 23 October, the start of battle. This was achieved by erecting dummy vehicles (in the same number and in the same places) where the real vehicles would be, both before they had moved and after. The dummies were to be so constructed that they would shelter and conceal the real vehicles, which were to be driven into position beneath the dummies. Thus, for example, when tanks moved up from the south to assemble in the north for battle, it would leave one set of dummies and come to another, and the tanks' tracks would be carefully obliterated. No change in the number or placing of vehicles would show up on the enemy's air photographs.

The arrangements made in the 26th Brigade's area can serve as an illustration of how it was done. Vehicles and dummies equal in number to the total required on 23 October were placed in the area by 1st October. All available vehicles were brought forward and the balance was provided by dummies. An officer was appointed to control the area and ensure that dummies could not be detected from the air. The dummies were interspersed among real vehicles, and drivers had to live near them and not



with their real vehicles. Vehicles were allowed to move in and out of the area, but it had to be made to appear that the dummies were also moving in and out. When it was the turn of a dummy to move it was collapsed and a real vehicle was run in and out so as to produce a track plan suggesting that all the vehicles were real. At the end of each day some real and dummy vehicles changed places.

By late October the Eighth Army had more than 220,000 men, and would muster on the day of battle more than 900 tanks and about 900 field and medium guns. The Axis forces were about 180,000 strong, of which a little less than half were Germans, and they had about 500 tanks.

The disclosures of the plan stage by stage downwards were made occasions for evoking the enthusiasm for which Montgomery was striving. Morshead expounded the plan to his commanding officers on 10th October, and in the address he gave, before he explained the operational tasks, there were many echoes of Montgomery's sentiments and expressions:

It will be a decisive battle, a hard and bloody battle and there must be only one result. Success will mean the end of the war in North Africa... No information about the operations to be disclosed to anyone likely to be taken prisoner... Wednesday 21st October and Thursday 22nd October will be devoted to the most intensive propaganda to educate attacking troops about the battle and enthusing them. Tell them that if we win, as we will, it will be the turning point of the war... We must go all out and every man give completely of his best. No faintheartedness. Imbue with fighting spirit. We must go into the battle with our heads high and the will to win... It will be a killing match... If you have anyone you are not sure of, then don't take the risk of taking him in. Give him some job other than fighting. We must all apply ourselves to the task that lies ahead, work, think, train, prepare, enthuse. We must regard ourselves as having been born for this battle.

Montgomery himself, in two conferences held on successive nights a few days before the battle, addressed all senior officers and commanding officers (who were forewarned not to smoke in his presence). As these men sat before Montgomery, as they listened to his precise and confident speech and perceived his mastery of the subject, as they heard from him how strongly the odds of battle were weighted in their favour, as they learnt that this attack was not to be one made by a few brigades but one in which the whole army's forces would be arrayed – they developed instantly a strong confidence in their commander and in his plan. Thus enthused, the commanding officers addressed the men in their units a day or two later, and read to them Montgomery's personal message in which he said that the Eighth Army was ready to carry out its mandate to destroy Rommel and his army, and would "hit the enemy for six right out of North Africa".

ALL DAY on the 23rd October the harsh sun and the flies tormented the restless assault troops in their slit trenches. By midday, the 2/17th Battalion diarist noted, the men were getting unsettled and it was impossible to keep them under cover in their cramped positions.

Men were confident and ready for the job ahead. Every man in the battalion knew his job and just what was required of him. No matter what happens or who gets hit, there will be someone who can take his place and do his job. Our men are certainly entering this action with the aggressive eagerness required by the army commander.

That the men were imbued with a confidence they had never before experienced, there could be no doubt. Emotionally charged anticipation was evident when, in some instances, they began chanting songs, old and new, as they were moved off in trucks to their pre-battle assembly areas.

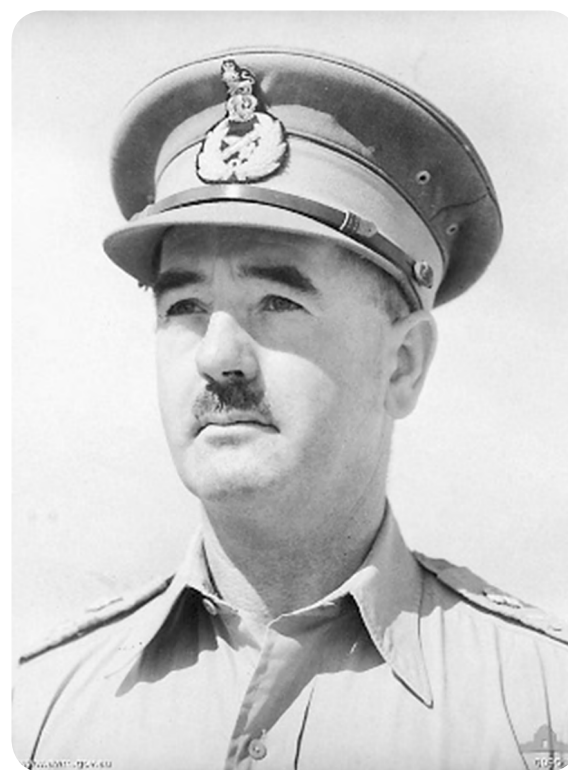
There was scarcely any movement on the face of the desert until late afternoon when suddenly it became alive with vehicles emerging from their camouflage and lining up to join the columns of traffic that had filled the roads. For 30 miles or more behind the forward defences, vehicles hurried westwards along every road or track leading to the front, in continuous parallel streams.

So, as the sun was setting, the elements of the Eighth Army moved to their battle stations. That night General Morshead wrote to his wife:

It is now 8.40 p.m. and in exactly two hours time by far the greatest battle ever fought in the Middle East will be launched. I have settled down in my hole in the ground at my battle headquarters, which is little more than 2000 yards from our start line. I have always been a firm believer in having HQ well forward – it makes the job easier, saves a great deal of time. In fact it has every possible advantage and I know of no disadvantage.

At the present time I can see and hear all the movement forward to battle positions – it is bright moonlight, tomorrow being full moon. A hard fight is expected, and it will no doubt last a long time. We have no delusions about that. But we shall win out, and I trust put an end to this running forward and backward to and from Benghazi.

The night of 23rd October was clear and illumined by a brilliant, almost full moon. As soon as it was dark a hot meal was served to the men, start lines were laid, and the routes to the forming-up positions taped. As



Major General Leslie Morshead, August 1941, Tobruk.  
[National Library of Australia, Image No 009517]

the leading battalions moved forward, following the tapes, a cool southerly breeze was blowing. The noise of the Eighth Army's transport, which had been reverberating like city traffic as night fell, lessened, then ceased. A sustained quietness reigned between the opposing armies. The men who were to go forward waited in silence as the moment came closer when the guns would strike the first chord of their harsh overture to battle.

When the hour for action drew near, a soft throbbing stole through the night and grew into a rhythmic, surging sound. The bomber aircraft that were to support the army's assault approached from the east and passed over. A few distant points of light then flickered unimpressively from the desert on the British side; they came from the muzzles of the long-range guns opening up in advance so that their first shells would fall in the same split second as those from the massed field artillery. In an instant, at the stroke of 9.40 p.m., flashes from hundreds of guns were seen sparkling in a long line across the desert. As a quiet interval follows a lightning flash before the thunder roll is heard, so the sound of the guns took time to reach the infantry. Seconds strolled by in silence until the sound wave from heavy guns pounding at a combined firing rate of some thousand rounds per minute crashed on the infantry's ears. For 15 minutes the bombardment continued unabated. Suddenly the guns were silent. Above the Eighth Army, two searchlights pointed long, still fingers into the sky. Five minutes passed. At 10 p.m. the two beams swung inward, intersected and stopped, forming a dimly seen symbol not unlike crossed swords. At that instant the British guns opened a barrage of unimaginable intensity, eclipsing their first performance, and to the urgent drumming of the guns the infantrymen stepped out from their start lines in slow, measured paces at the even rate of 75 yards per minute. A continuous stream of glowing tracer shells sailed over the heads of the advancing Australians, pointing in the direction of their attack. White and coloured flares lit up the sky above the enemy wire. The moon shone down. The fight was on.

Those infantrymen going forward did not conform to the popular image of agile, lightly-clad men, each with a weapon in his hands. In addition to their weapons they were loaded with ammunition, a few grenades, a pick or shovel, four sand-bags, personal kit, two days' rations and an emergency ration. Those assigned the deeper objectives would have to advance some 3 miles carrying this load, and still burdened with it they would have to fight.

By daylight on the 24th the 9th Division's front had erupted with fire of every kind – from field guns, machine guns, mortars, snipers directed at the infantry, high velocity fire aimed at the tanks, and fire from British tanks and guns in their rear engaging enemy targets. The pandemonium continued, with some periods of great intensity, for 12 days.

In the first two days of fighting the Eighth Army lost 6140 men killed, wounded or missing. It had expended much of its strength, but although some ramparts had been taken, the strong enemy front showed no sign of collapse. The impulse to break the deadlock would have to come from the army commander himself. A new strong punch would be needed.

While the 9th Division carried out its "crumbling" mandate to attack northwards and to draw upon itself as much of the enemy's fighting strength as possible, the remainder of the Eighth Army was making its preparations for the strong punch – Operation Supercharge. The crumbling mandate was Australia's contribution to the final breakthrough.

By late afternoon on 4 November the enemy was in full retreat before Operation Supercharge. At 3.30 p.m. Rommel authorised a general withdrawal to Fuka to avoid complete encirclement, marking the end of the Battle of El Alamein and the opening of the pursuit. In a report to

Hitler he said that the enemy in the northern sector had almost wiped out his forward troops. The Italian troops had no more fighting value and some had been abandoning strong positions without orders. Mobile warfare offered the only opportunity of halting the Allies. If permission were granted he would make "a fighting withdrawal platoon by platoon to a new position running south from Fuka". Next day a message was received from Hitler approving Rommel's decision to withdraw.

Rommel has described the calamitous situation in which his army then found itself. The traffic on the coast road between Fuka and Mersa Matruh was in "wild confusion". Overhead the RAF "reigned supreme, flying one attack after the other against every worthwhile target". His own headquarters was twice bombed and then was under fire from several British tanks. He ordered withdrawal to Matruh "with a heavy heart, because of the German and Italian formations still on the march". He and his staff then moved off:

on a wild helter-skelter drive through another pitch-black night... At that time it was still a matter of doubt as to whether we would be able to get even the remnants of the army away to the west... The bulk of the Italian infantry had been lost... The only forces which retained any fighting strength were the remnants of the 90th Light Division, the Afrika Korps' two divisions (now reduced to the strength of small combat groups), and a few quickly-scratched-together German units (the remains of the 164th Light Division). Tanks, heavy anti-aircraft guns, heavy and light artillery, all had sustained such frightful losses at El Alamein that there was nothing but a few remnants left.

Rommel was pursued but not caught. Some of the formations which gave chase were delayed by real difficulties, some by imaginary ones, some by their own lack of impetus. None evinced the initiative needed to catch their prey. Later the seasonal rains fell and the pursuit bogged down.

THERE WE SHALL LEAVE the Eighth Army, for the 9th Division was not to accompany it to Tobruk and Tripoli.

News that the enemy had not merely withdrawn but was in flight, and that there had been mass surrenders in the south, filtered through late on the afternoon of 5 November to the Australians, numbers of whom had been scrounging in the enemy's abandoned positions. Many flares, which the Germans and Italians used prolifically, had been found. As night fell throughout the 9th Division's area, light signals and flares of every kind, both British and German, were shot into the sky, a spontaneous fireworks celebration of the victory over Rommel.

The Eighth Army captured about 25,000 enemy, for losses of 13,560 killed, wounded or missing. The 9th Division's casualties from 23 October to 5 November were: killed 620, wounded 1944, prisoners of war 130. Total – 2694.

Rommel left behind about 450 tanks in the El Alamein area and more than 1000 guns. He escaped with but a dozen tanks.



**Opposite:** Poem written soon after the Australian 9th Division returned to the western desert. It was included with Ned's letter dated 11 August 1942. Author unknown.

The title *Ali Baba Morshead and His 20,000 Thieves* originated in a broadcast by Lord Haw Haw. He probably meant that by returning to the desert, the Australians were stealing victory from Rommel.



### Ali Baba Morshead and his Twenty-Thousand Thieves

Old Jerry had us on the run, the news was far from hot  
 He had his feet in Egypt, the Sphinx was on the spot  
 The GOC<sup>1</sup> despondent, sent signals out in sheaves  
 Calling Ali Baba Morshead and his twenty-thousand thieves.  
 Sir Leslie<sup>2</sup> called his General Staff and whispered in their ears  
 His message went to Aucky<sup>3</sup> – down a pot and drown your fears  
 We'll make that B – Rommel, think he's got the Gypsy heaves  
 Will Ali Baba Morshead and his twenty-thousand thieves.  
 So we travelled down to Egypt, from pleasant lands afar  
 We knew the need was urgent, cause we came by train and car  
 We didn't stop at Cairo, but Alex town does grieve  
 Over Ali Baba Morshead and his twenty-thousand thieves.  
 So we came back to the desert, well-known from days of yore  
 We met the Fritz at Alamein, close by the Meddy shore  
 The Ities were pathetic, the Huns fell back like leaves  
 From Ali Baba Morshead and his twenty-thousand thieves  
 Now Rommel's got a headache, his tanks can't take a trick  
 His drop shots aren't so wonderful and his Luftwaffe makes you sick  
 His glorious dreams of yesterday are ditched and is he peeved  
 While Ali Baba's gloating o'er his twenty-thousand thieves.  
 Will history repeat itself now we're once more in the game  
 Will the form displayed in '41 be just the bloody same

If so, Rommel's stonkered, whate'er the plans he weaves  
 'Gainst Ali Baba Morshead and his twenty-thousand thieves.

By the way, Darling, will you send this poetry on to Mother. I can't write too well as I've got a crook hand and it's a bit awkward to write.

So, Cheerio Dearest  
 NED

1. GOC – General Officer Commanding.
2. Sir Leslie – Leslie Morshead, commander of the 9th Division.
3. Aucky – General Auchinleck, overall commander in the Middle East. He was replaced by Alexander on 8 August, so the poem was written before that date.

Ali Baba Morshead & his Twenty Thousand Thieves.  
 Old Jerry had us on the run; the news was far from hot.  
 He had his feet in Egypt; the Sphinx was on the spot  
 The G.O.C. despondent, sent signals out in sheaves,  
 Calling Ali Baba Morshead & his twenty-thousand thieves.  
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 Will history repeat itself now we're once more in the game.  
 Will the form displayed in '41 be just the bloody same  
 P.T.O.

If so, Rommel's stonkered, whate'er the plans he weaves  
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 to Mother. I can't write too well as I've got a  
 crook hand & it's a bit awkward to write.

So, Cheerio Dearest  
 Ned x x x

# Rommel on El Alamein

Edited extracts, *The Rommel Papers*: 287-333



WITH THE FAILURE of our late August offensive against the British Alamein line, a new phase opened which was eventually to lead to the final collapse of our North African front. In the period from 6 September to 23 October the battle of supplies was waged with new violence. At the end of the period it had been finally lost by us and won by the British – by a wide margin. Our feelings at the failure of our supplies can be imagined. The supply ships which had been promised to reach us in time for our offensive at the end of August, in fact arrived in North Africa on 8 September. Meanwhile, the supply situation had attained crisis proportions, largely because the quantities sent to us had never once come up to the agreed target. During the first eight months of 1942 we had received approximately 120,000 tons – only 40 per cent of our minimum needs.

All the time the British were growing steadily stronger and our anxiety was therefore continually increasing. We demanded substantial reinforcements of antitank guns, to compensate at least in some measure for the tremendous British superiority in armour. We also asked for early reinforcement by another division. Rations, too, were beginning to be a problem, now that we were coming to the end of the captured stocks. On my visits to the front I was continually hearing of growing sick parades caused by the bad rations. Casualties from this cause were particularly heavy in divisions which contained troops who had been too long in Africa, or who had not been tested for fitness for tropical service.

I again pointed out the seriousness of the situation to the Fuehrer's HQ and stated that our supply problem must be solved by the use of every available scrap of shipping space; either that, or the German-Italian Panzer Army would not be able to hold out for long in North Africa. I demanded as a minimum the shipment of 30,000 tons during September and 35,000 tons during October. I also demanded the delivery of every vehicle which was being held in Germany and Italy for the Panzer Army. We sent back accurate and detailed reports of the effect of British attacks on our troops and demanded a considerable reinforcement of our air force, particularly in fighter strength. But it soon became obvious that we need entertain little hope that our demands would be met.

*9 September 1942*

My Dearest Lu – My health is now fairly well-restored and I hardly think anybody would notice anything. However, the doctor is pressing me hard to have a break in Germany and doesn't want me to postpone it any longer. But Stumme must first arrive and be installed in my job. On the one hand I'm overjoyed at the prospect of getting away for a while and seeing you, but on the other I fear I shall never be free of anxiety about this place, even though I won't be able to get to the front myself. I know Churchill is supposed to have said that he will only be able to hold Egypt a few months longer, but I'm more inclined to think that he's considering launching a new offensive with superior forces in four to six weeks' time.

## 500,000 MINES

The Alamein line lay between the sea and the Qattara Depression, which our reconnaissance had finally established as being impassable for major

vehicle columns. Thus it was the only front in North Africa, apart from the Akarit position, which could not be turned at its southern end. All other positions could be collapsed by tying them down frontally and outflanking them to the south. Everywhere else it was possible to make a surprise sweep with motorised forces round the southern end of the line in order to seek a decision by mobile warfare in the enemy's rear. This fact of the open flank had led repeatedly to completely novel situations. But at Alamein it was different. Any chance of a surprise appearance behind the British was completely ruled out. The defence was here at a certain advantage because it could dig in and protect itself with mines, while the attacker was exposed to the fire of the dug-in defence. And the attacker had no choice but to assault and overcome the defender's line.

We, for our part, had to prevent the British from breaking through our line, since, for the supply reasons already given, we could not face having to fight a mobile defensive battle. This brought me to two inescapable conclusions: (a) our position had to be held at all costs; (b) any penetration would have to be cleaned up by immediate counterattack to prevent it being extended into a breakthrough, for it was my opinion that if a breakthrough occurred the British would throw their whole striking power into the breach. We constructed our defence system to meet these requirements. We saw to it that the troops were given such firm positions, and the front held in such density, that a threatened sector could hold out against even the heaviest British attack long enough to enable the mobile reserve to come up, however long it was delayed by the RAF.

A very large number of mines was used in the construction of our line, something of the order of 500,000, counting the captured British minefields. In placing the minefields, particular care was taken to ensure that the troops could defend themselves to the side and rear, as well as to the front. Vast numbers of captured British bombs and shells were built into the defence, arranged in some cases for electrical detonation. Italian troops were interspersed with their German comrades so that an Italian battalion always had a German as its neighbour. The Italian armament was, unfortunately, so inefficient that it had to be distributed evenly over the whole front thus ensuring that German arms were also available in every sector. Our outposts were provided with dogs to give warning of any British approach to the minefields. We wanted to ensure that during an assault by the British, their work in clearing the minefields proceeded at the slowest possible speed and not until after our outposts had been eliminated.

Thus, during my absence in Germany while recuperating, the army was put on the defensive. But all our efforts were to prove unavailing against the immensely superior British forces, not because of mistakes we had made, but because victory was simply impossible under the terms on which we entered the battle.

## TORNADO OF FIRE

The battle which began at El Alamein on the 23rd October 1942 turned the tide of war in Africa against us and, in fact, probably represented the turning point of the whole vast struggle. The conditions under which my gallant troops entered the battle were so disheartening that there was



## ***Air Raid after Air Raid after Air Raid!***

practically no hope of our coming out of it victorious. Something over 200 German and about 300 Italian tanks faced qualitatively superior British armour to the strength of over 1000 tanks. True, we had a fair number of guns, but many of these were obsolete Italian types, many of them captured guns, and all of them terribly short of ammunition. In addition, the British had now gained complete air supremacy over the Mediterranean. By bombing our ports and maintaining close air observation over our sea routes, supplemented by intense naval activity, they were in a position virtually to paralyse our sea traffic. As a result, our stocks of supplies were so low that shortages of every kind were evident even at the beginning of the battle, with effects which will be clearly seen in the following account.

The 23rd October passed just like any other day on the Alamein front – until the evening. At 2140 hrs, a barrage of immense weight opened over the whole line, eventually concentrating on the northern sector. Such drum-fire had never before been seen on the African front and it was to continue throughout the whole of the Alamein battle. Apart from the artillery of the attacking and holding divisions, Montgomery had concentrated 15 artillery regiments (representing a total of 540 guns of a calibre greater than 105 mm) in the northern sector. The British bombarded our known positions with extraordinary accuracy, and RAF bombers also took part in the preparatory barrage. Enormous casualties resulted. Our communication network was soon smashed by the drum-fire, and reports from the front virtually ceased. Our outposts fought to the last round and then either surrendered or were killed.

Under the impact of the terrible British artillery fire, which grew to World War 1 proportions, part of the Italian 62nd Infantry Regiment left their line and streamed back to the rear. Exposed to this tornado of fire in their partially completed defence positions, their nerve had failed. By 0100 hrs the British had overrun our outposts over a width of 6 miles and penetrated to our main defence line. Although most of our heavy weapons had been smashed by the enemy artillery fire, our infantry resisted bitterly. Again and again the British brought up tanks. Soon they overran the remains of the 62nd Italian Infantry Regiment and broke into our line, where they were finally stopped by concentrated artillery fire. Two battalions were wiped out during the early hours of the morning by the accuracy of the British guns.

On the afternoon of the 24th, I was rung up by Field Marshal Keitel, who informed me of the above – that the British had been attacking at Alamein with powerful artillery and bomber support since the previous evening, and that General Stumme was missing. He asked whether I would be well enough to return to Africa and take over command again. I said I would. I spent the next few hours in a state of acute anxiety, until the evening when I received a telephone call from Hitler himself. He said that Stumme was still missing – either captured or killed – and asked whether I could start for Africa immediately. I was to telephone him again before I actually took off because he did not want me to interrupt my treatment unless the British attack assumed dangerous proportions. I ordered my aircraft for 7 o'clock next morning. Finally, shortly after midnight, a call came through from the Fuehrer. In view of developments at Alamein he found himself obliged to ask me to fly back to Africa and resume my

command. I took off next morning. I knew there were no more laurels to be earned in Africa, for I had learnt from reports that supplies had fallen far short of my minimum demands. But just how bad the supply situation really was I had yet to find out.

On arriving at Rome at about 1100 hrs [25 October] I was met at the airport by General von Rintelen. He informed me of the latest events in the African theatre. After heavy artillery preparation, the enemy had taken part of our line and several battalions had been completely wiped out. The British attack was still in progress and General Stumme still missing. General von Rintelen also informed me that only three issues of petrol remained in the African theatre; it had been impossible to send any more across in the last weeks, partly because the Italian Navy had not provided the shipping and partly because of the British sinkings. This was sheer disaster, for with only 300 kilometres worth of petrol per vehicle between Tripoli and the front – and that calculated over good driving country – we could not resist for very long; we would be completely prevented from taking the correct tactical decisions and would thus suffer a tremendous limitation in our freedom of action. I was bitterly angry, because when I left North Africa there had been at least eight issues for the army in Egypt and Libya, and even this had been absurdly little in comparison with the minimum essential of 30 issues. Experience had shown that one issue of petrol was required for each day of battle; without it, the army was crippled and could not react to the enemy's moves. General von Rintelen regretted the situation, but said that he had unfortunately been on leave and had consequently been unable to attend to the supply question.

### **RIVERS OF BLOOD**

I crossed the Mediterranean in my Storch and reached headquarters at dusk. That night our line again came under a heavy artillery barrage, which soon developed into one long roll of fire. I slept only a few hours and was back in my command vehicle again at 0500 hrs where I learnt that the British had spent the whole night assaulting our front under cover of their artillery, which in some places had fired as many as 500 rounds for every one of ours. Shortly before midnight the enemy had succeeded in taking Hill 28<sup>1</sup>, an important position in the northern sector.

Attacks were now launched on Hill 28 by elements of the 15th Panzer Division, supported by the concentrated fire of all the local artillery and anti-aircraft guns. Unfortunately, the attack gained ground very slowly. The British resisted desperately. Rivers of blood were poured out over miserable strips of land which, in normal times, not even the poorest Arab would have bothered his head about.

British infantry attacks, supported by tanks, tried again and again to break out from Hill 28 to the west through our line. Finally, in the afternoon [26th October], a thrust by 160 tanks succeeded in wiping out an already severely mauled battalion of the 164th Infantry Division and penetrated into our line towards the southwest. Violent fighting followed in which our remaining tanks managed to force the enemy back. Tank casualties so far were 117, all totally destroyed.

Late in the afternoon, German and Italian dive-bomber formations made an attempt to break up a British lorry column moving towards the

1. Called by the British "Kidney Ridge" from the shape of the elevation contour on the map.

northwest. Never before in Africa had we seen such a density of anti-aircraft fire. Hundreds of British tracer shells crisscrossed the sky and the air became an absolute inferno of fire. Some 60 British fighters pounced on our slow machines and forced the Italians to jettison their bombs over their own lines, while the German pilots pressed home their attack with very heavy losses.

The supply situation was now approaching disaster. The tanker *Proserpina*, which we had hoped would bring some relief in the petrol situation, had been bombed and sunk outside Tobruk. There was only enough petrol left to keep supply traffic going between Tripoli and the front for another two or three days, and that without counting the needs of the motorised forces, which had to be met out of the same stocks. What we should really have done now was to assemble all our motorised units in the north in order to fling the British back to the main defence line in a concentrated and planned counter-attack. But we had not the petrol to do it. So I was compelled to order the armoured formations in the northern part of our line to assault, piecemeal, the British penetration. There is, in general, little chance of success in a tank attack over country where the enemy has been able to take up defensive positions, but there was nothing else we could do.

In the evening of the 27th October we sent an SOS to Rome and the Fuehrer's HQ. But there was now no longer any hope of an improvement in the situation. It was obvious that from now on the British would destroy us bit by bit, since we were virtually unable to move on the battlefield. And as yet, Montgomery had only thrown half his striking force into the battle.

28 October 1942

Dearest Lu – Who knows whether I'll have a chance to sit down and write in peace in the next few days – or ever again. Today there's still a chance. The battle is raging. Perhaps we will still manage to be able to stick it out in spite of all that's against us, but it may go wrong and that would have very grave consequences for the whole course

of the war. North Africa would then fall to the British in a few days, almost without a fight. We will do all we can to pull it off, but the enemy's superiority is terrific and our resources very small. Whether I would survive a defeat lies in God's hands. The lot of the vanquished is heavy. I'm happy in my own conscience that I've done all I can for victory and have not spared myself.

I realised so well in the few short weeks I was at home what you two mean to me<sup>1</sup>. My thoughts are of you.

No one can conceive the extent of my anxiety during this period. I hardly slept on the 28th and by 0300 hrs was pacing up and down turning over in my mind the likely course of the battle and the decisions I might have to take. It seemed doubtful whether we would be able to stand up much longer to attacks of the weight which the British were now making, and which they were, in any case, still able to increase. It was obvious to me that I dared not await the British breakthrough, but would have to pull back to the west before it came. Such a decision, however, would lead to the loss of a large proportion of my non-motorised infantry. If retreat were nevertheless forced upon us, the principal aim would be to get as many tanks and weapons away to the west as possible. On no account could they be allowed to await their complete destruction on the Alamein line.

So I decided that morning [29 October] that if British pressure became too strong I would withdraw to the Fuka position before the battle had reached its climax.

29 October 1942

Dearest Lu – The situation continues very grave. By the time this letter arrives, it will no doubt have been decided whether we can hold on or not. I haven't much hope left. At night I lie with my eyes wide open, unable to sleep, from the load that is on my shoulders. In the day I'm dead tired. What will happen if things go wrong here? That is the thought that torments me day and night.



**Left:** Captured German 88 mm anti-aircraft, antitank gun at El Alamein. [Hank Newton, NH09, 1942]

1. Rommel is referring to his wife and only child Manfred who was born in 1928. Manfred collaborated with Liddell-Hart in compiling *The Rommel Papers*. He was Lord Mayor of Stuttgart from 1974 until 1996. While in this position he enjoyed friendship with Maj. Gen. George Patton IV (son of one of his father's World War 2 adversaries, George S. Patton) who was serving at a nearby US base. Manfred retired from politics in 1996.



My army was facing annihilation unless its mobile formations could immediately be supplied with sufficient petrol. Finally it dawned on Rome to press submarines, warships, civilian aircraft and additional shipping space into service. If only this had been done after the fall of Tobruk, we would have been sitting in front of the Nile delta, not in front of El Alamein. But now it was becoming steadily clearer that it was too late.

The 29th of October came and went and still the British had not launched their big attack, which was daily or even hourly expected. They were obviously regrouping.

That day we had the Fuka position reconnoitred.

## FINAL DESTRUCTION

The renewed British assault came on the night of the 1st November. For three hours, shells from hundreds of British guns burst on our main defence line, while relays of night bombers attacked our troops. Then massed British infantry and tanks advanced westward behind a moving curtain of fire. The British soon made a penetration and moved on with tanks and armoured cars to the west. After some heavy fighting we succeeded in halting this advance by calling on reserves. The enemy then steadily strengthened his forces in this wedge he had driven into our line.

*2 November 1942*

Dearest Lu – Very heavy fighting again, not going well for us. The enemy, with his superior strength, is slowly levering us out of our position. That will mean the end. You can imagine how I feel. Air raid after air raid after air raid!

During the evening of the 2nd November it became clear that the British were concentrating their second-line armour at their point of penetration. So our final destruction was upon us. The Afrika Korps had only 35 serviceable tanks left. This then, was the moment to get back to the Fuka line.

Seeing that the British had so far been following up hesitantly, and that their operations had always been marked by an extreme, often incomprehensible, caution, I hoped to be able to salvage at least part of the infantry. The army's strength was so exhausted after its 10 days of battle that it was not now capable of offering any effective opposition to the enemy's next breakthrough attempt, which we expected to come next day. With our great shortage of vehicles, an orderly withdrawal of the non-motorised forces appeared impossible. Added to that, the mobile forces were so firmly locked in battle that we could not expect to be able to disengage all of them. In these circumstances we had to reckon, at the least, with the gradual destruction of the army. I reported in these terms to HQ.

*3 November 1942*

Dearest Lu – The battle is going very heavily against us. We're simply being crushed by enemy weight. I've made an attempt to salvage part of the army. I wonder if it will succeed. At night I lie open-eyed, racking my brains for a way out of this plight for my poor troops. We are facing very difficult days, perhaps the most difficult that a man can undergo. The dead are lucky – it's all over for them. I think of you constantly with heartfelt love and gratitude. Perhaps all will yet be well and we shall see each other again.

*3 November 1942*

Dearest Lu – The battle still rages with unspent fury. I can no longer, or scarcely any longer, believe in its successful outcome. Berndt flies to the Fuehrer today to report. Enclosed 25,000 lire that I've saved. What will become of us is in God's hands.

## THE FUEHRER INTERFERES

The 3rd November will remain a memorable day in history. For not only did it become finally clear on that day that the fortunes of war had deserted us, but from that day on the Panzer Army's freedom of decision was continually curtailed by the interference of higher authority in its conduct of operations.

Already in the morning I had an uncomfortable feeling that in spite of our unequivocal situation reports, our higher command had not drawn the proper conclusions from the conditions we were facing. I therefore decided to send Lieutenant Berndt to report direct to the Fuehrer. Berndt was to leave the Fuehrer's HQ in no doubt about our situation, and was to indicate that the African theatre of war was probably already lost. He was to demand the fullest freedom of action for the Panzer Army. I wanted at all costs to avoid playing into the hands of the British in their efforts to surround and destroy us. I intended to fight delaying actions in as many intermediate positions as possible, forcing the enemy to bring up his artillery each time, and to avoid any decisive battle until either we had grown strong enough for it or the bulk of my army had been carried across to Europe with only a small part left in Africa to cover the retreat.

At 1330 hrs on the 3rd, an order arrived from the Fuehrer in roughly the following words:

TO FIELD MARSHALL ROMMEL – In the situation in which you find yourself there can be no other thought but to stand fast and throw every gun and every man into the battle. The utmost efforts are being made to help you. Your enemy, despite his superiority, must also be at the end of his strength. It would not be the first time in history that a strong will has triumphed over bigger battalions. As to your troops, you can show them no other road than that to victory or death.

ADOLPH HITLER

This order demanded the impossible. In spite of our unvarnished situation reports, it was apparently still not realised at the Fuehrer's HQ how matters really stood in Africa. Arms, petrol and aircraft could have helped us, but not orders. We were completely stunned, and for the first time during the African campaign I did not know what to do. A kind of apathy took hold of us as we issued orders, on instructions from the highest authority, for all existing positions to be held. I forced myself to this action as I had always demanded unconditional obedience from others and, consequently, wished to apply the same principle to myself. Had I known what was to come I should have acted differently, because from that time on I had continually to circumvent orders from the Fuehrer in order to save the army from destruction. But this first instance of interference in the tactical conduct of the African war came as a considerable shock.

Withdrawal to the west was stopped and everything possible was done to strengthen our fighting power. To the Fuehrer we reported that

any further attempt to stand in our existing positions would mean the inevitable loss of the army and thus of the whole of North Africa.

The Fuehrer's order had a powerful effect on the troops. At his command they were ready to sacrifice themselves to the last man, even while knowing that with the greatest effort the course of the battle could not be changed. An overwhelming bitterness welled up in me when I saw the superlative spirit of my army.

In the evening I sent Lieutenant Berndt off to the Fuehrer's HQ. He was to report that if the Fuehrer's order were upheld, the final destruction of the German-Italian Army would be a matter of days only, and was to add that we had already suffered immense harm because of it.

## THE RETREAT BEGINS

The picture in the early afternoon of 4 November was as follows: powerful British armoured forces had burst a 12-mile hole in our front, through which strong bodies of enemy tanks were moving to the west. As a result of this, our forces in the north were threatened with encirclement by enemy formations 20 times their number in tanks. There were no reserves, as every available man and gun had been put into the fight.

So now it had come. The thing we had done everything in our power to avoid – our front broken and the fully motorised enemy streaming into our rear. Superior orders could no longer count. We had to save what there was to be saved. The army had already lost so much as a result of the Fuehrer's order, including practically the whole of its infantry and large numbers of tanks, vehicles and guns, that it was no longer in a position to offer effective opposition to the British advance at any point. I issued orders for the retreat at 1530 hrs and the movement began immediately. This decision could at least be the means of saving the motorised part of the Panzer Army from destruction. Next morning – far too late – signals arrived from the Fuehrer authorising the withdrawal of the army.

## ARMED WITH A PITCHFORK

We had lost the decisive battle of the African campaign. It was decisive because our defeat had resulted in the loss of a large part of our infantry and motorised forces. The astonishing thing was that the authorities, both German and Italian, looked for the fault not in the failure of supplies, not in our air inferiority, not in the order to conquer or die at Alamein, but in the commanders and troops. The military careers of most of the people who aimed these accusations at us were notable for a consistent absence from the front, on the principle of *weit vom Schuss gibt alte Krieger* – far from the battle makes old soldiers. It was even said that we had thrown

away our weapons, that I was a defeatist, a pessimist in adversity, and therefore largely responsible. My refusal to sit down under this constant calumny aimed at my valiant troops was to involve me later in many violent arguments and rows.

The victim of it all was my army, which, after my departure from Tunis, fell to a man into British hands, while highly qualified armchair strategists were still entertaining ideas about operations against Casablanca.

Looking back, I am conscious of only one mistake – that I did not circumvent the "Victory or Death" order 24 hours earlier. Then the army would, in all probability, have been saved with all its infantry in at least a semi-battleworthy condition.

To leave future historians in no doubt as to the conditions and circumstances under which both German troops and command had to labour at El Alamein, I give the following summary.

The first essential condition for an army to be able to stand the strain of battle is an adequate stock of weapons, petrol and ammunition. In fact, the battle is fought and decided by the quartermasters before the shooting begins. The bravest men can do nothing without guns, the guns nothing without plenty of ammunition, and neither guns nor ammunition are of much use in mobile warfare unless there are vehicles with sufficient petrol to haul them around.

A second essential condition for an army to be able to stand in battle is parity, or at least something approaching parity, in the air. In our case neither of the conditions I have described were in the slightest degree fulfilled and we had to suffer the consequences. There was no real redress either for our inferiority in the air nor for the supply situation; nor was it possible to motorise the infantry. We simply did what we could, with our very meagre resources, to come to terms with the unalterable disadvantages under which we suffered. It was a matter of getting the best out of a hopeless situation. Armed with a pitchfork, the finest fighting man can do little against an opponent with a Tommy gun in his hands.

In these circumstances, there was never any chance of my army achieving success at El Alamein. Our sole advantage, compared with the many afforded to the enemy, was the possession of prepared positions; but these were soon stormed after a terrible artillery and air bombardment by British infantry, who gnawed their way yard by yard into our defences.

The bravery of the German and of many of the Italian troops in this battle, even in the hour of disaster, was admirable. My army had behind it a record of 18 magnificent months, such as has seldom been equalled, and every one of my soldiers who fought at Alamein was defending not only his homeland, but also the tradition of the Panzer Army Afrika. The struggle of my army, despite its defeat, will be a glorious page in the annals of the German and Italian peoples.



AT EL ALAMEIN, Rommel had lost roughly 75,000 men, 1000 guns and 500 tanks. Concerned that his army would be completely enveloped and destroyed if he once again halted to face the Eighth Army, Rommel withdrew all the way to Tunisia where he could link with the Axis army forming there in response to the Allied landings in West Africa.

Hitler was determined to retain hold of Tunisia, and Rommel finally started to receive replacement men and materials. The Axis now faced a war in Africa on two fronts: the Eighth Army approaching from the east, and the British, French and Americans from the west.

Having reached Tunisia, Rommel launched an attack against U.S. forces which were threatening to cut his lines of supply north to Tunis. Rommel inflicted a sharp defeat on the inexperienced Americans at the Kasserine Pass in February 1943. Hopes, on the Allied side, of a rapid conclusion to the North African campaign were thwarted.

Rommel immediately turned back against the British and met them at the Mareth Line (the abandoned French defences on the Libyan border). But Rommel could only delay the inevitable. His last offensive in North Africa was on 6 March 1943, when he attacked the Eighth Army at the Battle of Medenine. After losing 52 tanks, Rommel called off

the assault. On 9 March he handed over command and left Africa because of health reasons, never to return.

On 13 May 1943, Axis resistance in Africa ended with the surrender of over 275,000 prisoners of war. Rommel summed up the situation in these words (*Rommel Papers*, 421-422):

Terrible as it was to know that all my men had found their way into Anglo-American prison camps, even more shattering was the realisation that our star was in decline, and the knowledge of how little the German High Command measured up to the trials which lay ahead.



## Your forlorn friend

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
[undated, probably 6-7 November]*

TO MY DARLING FIANCÉE – Well, Precious, still no news from you. I've just about given up hope of hearing from you again. The last letter I received was written 7th June – rather a loving letter, too. Have you been ill, Darling? What's wrong?

I haven't any news, Sweetest, this time, as there's nothing doing here at present. I've just came back from a swim in the old Meddie<sup>1</sup> and it's slightly cool. I suppose it's getting warm again over there, eh. I wish the devil I was back, but that's off the cards for quite some time to come, I guess, worse luck.

Well, Darling, things are very dull here and I've nothing to write that I can put on paper, so I'll say cheerio, Darling. Give my regards to your mother and everyone else, and wish them happy Christmas for me. How is Jean<sup>2</sup> getting on? Got a boyfriend yet? By the way, Dear, Mum was wondering why you don't write to her as she likes to get your letters. She also said she invited you down for a holiday.

Well, Precious, I'll say cheerio again. Keep your chin up and keep smiling. It will all turn out for the best.

*From your ever-loving fiancé  
NED*

1. After El Alamein, the 2/15th Battalion were relieved from battle duties and moved to the Mediterranean coast.

2. Jean is Dawn's sister.

3. Ned came out of action at El Alamein on 6 November.

*QX3199 Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
'D' Coy, 2/15 Inf. Bn, AIF Abroad  
Tuesday, 15 December 1942*

DEAR DAWN – I received your last letter about one month ago, the one with the bad news, and though I had half expected it, it was quite a knock to me. As fate would have it, I received it two days after we came out of action<sup>3</sup>. Sweet, you can guess how I felt. I wished a lot of things had happened in that show that didn't. I still feel a trifle lost and wonder if it really is true.

Oh, Sweet, I wish you had waited. I know I've told you lots of times to write and tell me if you had changed about me, but I honestly believed you wouldn't. Well, now it has happened and life doesn't seem worth living in a way. But I guess I'll survive, eh.

I won't say any more, Dawn, except I was only living for the day we'd be together and I could make it up to you for a lot of things you've missed, and for some of the things I've done. I'm terrible sorry, Sweet, it had to end this way, but maybe it's all for the best.

Well, Dawn, there's not much to tell you. You'll have read all about our part in the desert push by now. I'm still okay and got through without a scratch, thank God – although I was the only one left in my section.

I've just come back from five days' leave in Tel Aviv and am still feeling the effects, to be honest. We had quite a spree. I've got both hands bandaged up as a result and it's a little awkward to write, worse luck, so you will have to excuse me.

Well, Dawn, I was sorry to hear you had been in hospital and that you'd had a bad time. I hope you've had no after affects since.

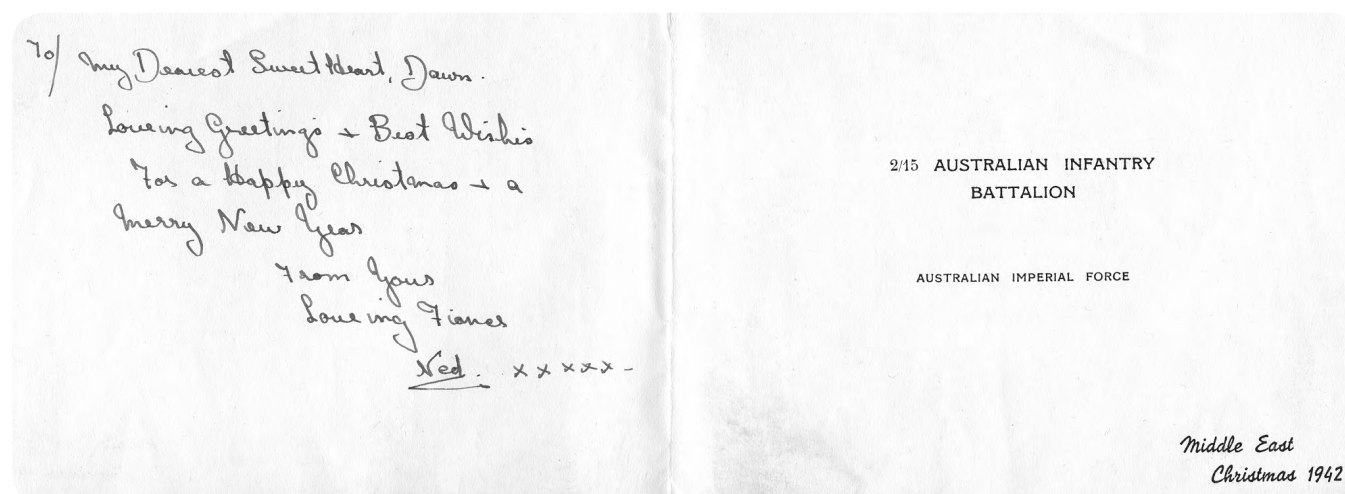
By the way, did you know a chap by the name of Kim O'Donovan who used to work at the Monto butter factory? He's now over here in 'D' Company with me.

Well, Dawn, I'll close this as I can't write any more at present. Wishing you all the best and I'll write again soon. Cheerio.

*Your forlorn friend  
NED*

P.S. Mother was a bit cut up about your decision.

*NED*



**Left:** Christmas card sent by Ned with his undated November letter.

# Homeward

Edited extracts, *Official History*: vol 3, 745-753

GENERALS ALEXANDER and Montgomery called on General Morshead on 4 November to express their appreciation of the Australian 9th Division's part in winning the victory at El Alamein. Congratulatory messages began to pour in, including tributes from the Governor-General of Australia, the President of the United States, General Blamey, General Montgomery and General Leese. The recognition of the importance of the 9th Division's fighting accorded in these messages, which were published throughout the division, profoundly revived and renewed the morale of the battle-weary troops, most of whom had lost several coppers in the ordeal. No tribute was more appreciated than the letter Leese wrote to Morshead on 6 November:

Now that we have a pause in the fighting, I would like to write a line to congratulate you on the magnificent fighting which your division has carried out, and to thank you personally for your great cooperation and sound judgement during the battle. I would be very grateful if you would explain to the men the immense part they have played in the battle. It is perhaps difficult for them quite to realise the magnitude of their achievement as the main breakout of our armour was accomplished on another part of the front, thus could not be seen by them. But I am quite certain that this breakout was only made possible by the Homeric fighting in your divisional sector. When it was no longer possible for the crumbling process to go on in the south, you will remember that Montgomery decided

to continue with his crumbling policy in the north. This led to five days' bitter fighting on your front. During this time your division attacked four times and was counter-attacked incessantly by enemy infantry and tanks. The main mass of heavy and medium artillery was concentrated on your divisional front. It was obvious that the enemy meant to resist any advance along the coastal route, and as we now know, they concentrated the whole of the Panzer Corps against you in the northern area. Your fighting gave the opportunity for the conception of the final breakthrough in the centre, but this could never have been carried out if your front had been broken. The final break was, in my opinion, a very bold conception by Montgomery, and one which he could never have carried out unless he was certain of the valiant resistance that would be put up by your division. If the Germans could have broken your division, the success of the attack would have been vitally prejudiced.

On the morning of 6 November, the advanced headquarters of the 9th Division moved back to a position near El Alamein, and units moved to bivouac areas near the coast. Their first task, energetically put in hand, was to make the area both hygienic and safe. Unburied dead of both sides, but mainly of the enemy, were collected and buried; the refuse around old Italian positions was cleared away; and a thorough combing of the area was instituted to rid it of mines. A storm on the night of 6th November filled dugouts with water and blew down tents and hastily-erected bivouacs,





but nobody seemed to mind. Nothing could impair the men's sense of relief and release from battle involvement. In the following week a great deal of work was carried out in salvaging equipment from the battlefield.

### RETURN TO PALESTINE

General Alexander visited Morshead on 19 November and they discussed the question of leave for the Australians. The upshot of the visit was that Alexander agreed to the division's return to Palestine and the immediate granting of leave. The first passes were issued to men applying for leave to visit friends in hospital. Requiem masses and memorial services were held at El Alamein cemetery by most units, and on 30th November the move to Palestine began. The division journeyed in 12 convoys, two leaving daily, each bivouacking by the roadside on the next three nights, and reaching the Gaza area on the fourth day. By 9 December, most of the division was established in the Australian base camps near Gaza, and troops were granted leave to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa and Cairo.

### NEW INSIGNIA

On 17 December a new divisional colour patch was issued. It was shaped like a 'T' but with the vertical stroke shortened. There was much speculation as to the origin of the 'T' shape and some years later Morshead was asked to comment. He wrote:

The 'T' stood for Tobruk. The 9th Division was hurriedly formed and wore a collection of colour patches – oblongs, squares, circles, ovals. After coming out of Tobruk I decided we should have the one form, but knowing how attached the men were to their old colour patches the change had to be unanimously accepted. If not, then there would be no change. Finally, but not altogether readily, it was accepted... I had decided, as all other simple forms from squares to circles had long since been bespoken, on the combination of two oblongs, the larger one on top.

### PARADE AT GAZA

On 22 December a divisional parade was held at Gaza Airport. General Alexander, at Morshead's invitation, took the salute. The pride that the 9th Division had developed in itself and in its reputation was exemplified



during the parade by the smartness of the turnout of every man and the exemplary marching and arms-drill of every unit at the parade.

On a perfect day, in a setting of green fields – a vast contrast to the scenes of their exploits – over 12,000 officers and men of the 9th Australian Division formed up in units in line: an inspiring spectacle three-quarters of a mile long, the massed brass bands of the division drawn up in the rear.

Clustered around the dais were the robes of four Sheiks and of the Governor of Sinai, be-ribboned generals from several Allied nations, the blue and gold uniforms of naval officers, the lighter blue uniforms of the RAF, the dresses of women guests, and here and there the tailored suits of diplomats. But proudest of all, the wounded in hospital blues who had come to watch their mates "bung on

a show". In front of the spectators was a row of white flags, each bearing the new T-shaped colour patch.

A cloud of dust heralded the approach of the car bearing General Alexander and General Morshead. The Australian flag was broken at the mast, and, in rotation, the bands played a slow march for the salute and the inspection, which General Alexander carried out standing in the back of an open car. The long inspection completed, the men, now somewhat jaded, having been up since an early hour and more than an hour on parade, listlessly resigned themselves to what might prove a long speech. But with General Alexander's words "And great deeds have been done", heads were held perhaps a little higher as the General went on to extol the prowess of the soldiers.

Officers, warrant officers, noncommissioned officers and men of the Australian Imperial Force; these great days we are living in are a time for deeds rather than words, but when great deeds have been done there is no harm in speaking of them. And great deeds have been done. The Battle of Alamein has made history, and you are in the proud position of having taken a major part in that great victory. Your reputation as fighters has always been famous, but I do not believe you have ever fought with greater bravery or distinction than you did during that battle when you broke the German and Italian armies in the western desert. Now you have added fresh lustre to your already illustrious name. Your losses have been heavy indeed, and for that we are all greatly distressed. But war is a hard and bloody affair, and great victories cannot be won without sacrifice.

It is always a fine and moving spectacle to see, as I do today, worthy men who have done their duty on the battlefield assembled in ranks on parade, and those ranks filled again with young recruits and fresh reinforcements. To these future warriors I extend a warm welcome and greet them as brothers in arms who have come to join the forces in the Middle East which it is my honour to command.

What of the future? There is no doubt that the fortunes of war have turned in our favour. We now have the initiative and can strike when and where we will. It is we who will choose the future battlegrounds, and we will choose them where we can hit the enemy hardest and hurt him most. There is a hard and bitter struggle ahead before we

**Top:** Unidentified Australian soldier in front of pyramid while on leave in Cairo.  
[Ned, NF89, December 1942]

**Right:** Ned's 9th Division insignia – 'T' for Tobruk.  
[Ned, NF03, December 1942]



**Opposite:** El Alamein cemetery.  
[Ned, NF51, December 1942]



come to final victory, and much hard fighting to be done. In the flux and change of war individuals will change. Some will come, others will go. Formations will move from one theatre to another, and where you will be when the next battles are fought I do not know. But wherever you may be my thoughts will always go with you, and I shall follow your fortunes with interest and your successes with admiration.

There is one thought I shall cherish above all others – under my command fought the Australian 9th Division.

At the conclusion of the address General Morshead took command of the parade. His order calling the parade to attention was probably the first order a large majority of those present had heard him utter. Then followed the tribute of thousands of fighting men to their dead – The Salute to Fallen Comrades. On the execution of “Present Arms!” all ranks, other than those armed with rifles, saluted. The flag was lowered as massed

buglers sounded the *Last Post*, the last wailing note echoing and reechoing away in the distance. Then *Reveille*, and the flag was raised.

To play the marchers past the saluting base where General Alexander took the salute, the massed bands moved forward to a position opposite the dais and played *Advance Australia Fair*. The division then marched past, 40 abreast in close column, and wheeled away to assembling points where they had their midday meal before returning to the camps.

The next two days were spent mainly in preparations for Christmas festivities. Christmas Day was spent in the traditional army manner: after church services a bounteous dinner was provided, rations being generously supplemented with poultry, pork and the usual trimmings by the Australian Comforts Fund and grants from regimental funds. In a number of instances officers acted as mess orderlies. Boxing Day was also a holiday, but on this day commanding officers were called to a conference and informed that the AIF was to move from the Middle East.

As preparations for the move proceeded it became apparent that a long





sea voyage was ahead and that the direction would be south from the canal zone. Embarkation began on 24th January and continued until the 31st. As embarkation on each transport was completed the vessel moved out, later to rendezvous off Massawa on the Eritrean coast.

The ships were crowded, with little space for assembly, so the troops settled down to a routine of instruction, lectures and sport to the extent that the limited deck space allowed. The convoy that assembled at Massawa was composed of the troopships *Queen Mary*, *Aquitania* [on which travelled the 2/15], *Ile de France*, *Nieuw Amsterdam* and the armed merchant cruiser *Queen of Bermuda*. It left Massawa on 3 February closely escorted by a cruiser and several destroyers. Six days later the convoy broke formation and anchored off a group of small islands to refuel and take in water. The location of this secluded refuelling point was not disclosed to the troops. It was the Addu Atoll, a ring of coral islets in the Maldives group which, under the designation of Port T, had been developed since 1941 as a secret anchorage for the British and Allied naval squadrons in the Indian Ocean. Refuelling continued throughout the night and the convoy was again under way by 1330 hrs on the 10th.

Soon after leaving Addu Atoll the troops passed the British Eastern Fleet – battleships and cruisers with attendant destroyers – lying a mile or so abeam, a magnificent spectacle. A signal flashed from the flagship, in reference to the departure of the Australians from Egypt. “Rommel will

be relieved, but the Japs will have the jim-jams. In case we don't sight you again, au revoir until we meet in Tokyo.”

Led by the *Queen Mary*, the big fast ships sailed on into the southern Indian Ocean, arriving off Fremantle on 18 February. It took another week before the *Aquitania* entered Sydney Heads just after noon on 27 February. The ship was greeted by Generals Morshead and Lavarack the next morning, and later in the day the 2/15th Battalion boarded a train for Queensland which reached Brisbane on 1 March.

Leave passes for 21 days were arranged as soon as the men reached the staging camp at Ascot Racecourse, the last of the men making their departure from camp by 1700 hrs.



**Opposite:** The ceremonial parade of the 9th Division at Gaza Airport, 22nd December 1942. It extended for almost a mile.  
[DS74]

**Below:** Rats of Tobruk. Two soldiers of the 2/15 with a captured machine gun at the entrance to a dugout.  
[Ned, NF55, 1941]



## Ned's Little Wedding Ring



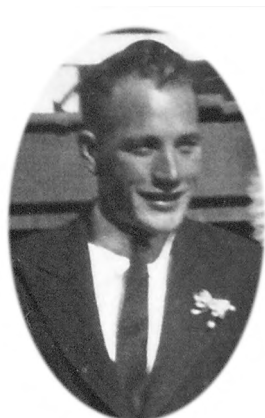
JACK WOODBRIDGE AND I, we used to go to the dances together. I knew him for a while because everyone went to the dances. He used to ride his horse into Monto. We weren't engaged but we were friendly, close enough to know one another as good friends. We were... an *item* I suppose you'd say, more or less. We thought a lot of one another. We did. I'm not hiding it from anybody – but I was sorry it happened. It shows that you can love two people.

Hmm... I suppose I mentioned it in a letter to Ned – and I shouldn't have. I shouldn't have said anything about Jack because Ned was fighting in the bloomin' front line. It really wasn't fair to him. I shouldn't have done it. Oh well. Wished I'd waited. And Ned probably wrote to Lou, his mother, and told her that I might have... sort of broken it off.

But I felt I also did the wrong thing by Jack. I never told him about Ned. That was the sad part about it. I don't know how Jack found out. I never explained it to him and that was what I was sorry about.

I saw Jack in town here once when I had one of the babies. He knew what had happened, but I never really fronted him and said I'm sorry, which is what I should have done. Years later I rang his sister. I thought: *Oh, I'll catch up with Jack and just... I'd like to see him and say I'm sorry.* So I rang Josie. She remembered me. I asked about Jack and she said he'd been dead a few years. He had a wife. They went to Sydney and lived. Got away from everything here, I think she said, and had three children.

Yeah, I wish I'd seen Jack. Just seen him once more and spoken to him. But I was too late and I've always regretted it. If I hadn't seen Ned



again I might have married Jack. But when I saw Ned at the train station after his return – I knew.

I didn't know Ned was home till Dad told me. Gran Flewell<sup>1</sup> sent Dad a telegram I suppose. They must have been exchanging letters. Anyway, Dad said I'd better go to Brisbane, that Ned was home. To be honest, I went down with mixed feelings. I suppose that's what you'd call it.

Dad drove me to the train. You could get a train from Mulgildie to Mungar Junction just out of Maryborough. The Northern Mail from Cairns stopped at Mungar Junction where trains went every direction. I got out at midnight and waited for the Cairns train to come through. It was full of soldiers sleeping everywhere.

I opened the carriage door when I got to Brisbane and I didn't know if Ned was going to be there or not. I looked where everyone was heading and I couldn't see him. Then I looked the other way – and there he was, way down at the end of the platform standing by himself in his uniform. I knew it was Ned. He was waiting to see if I was gonna walk out and ignore him, or go up to him. I remember I walked towards him, then I ran. I made up my mind then.

Ned came back in early March 1943 and we started our lives together afresh. Two weeks later, Saturday 13 March, we got married in the Methodist Church at Roma St. Just ourselves and Ned's mum and dad. His cousin, Joan Bugler, was the bridesmaid. None of my family was there. It was a very rushed wedding. We got married before he went away with his battalion to the Atherton Tableland.

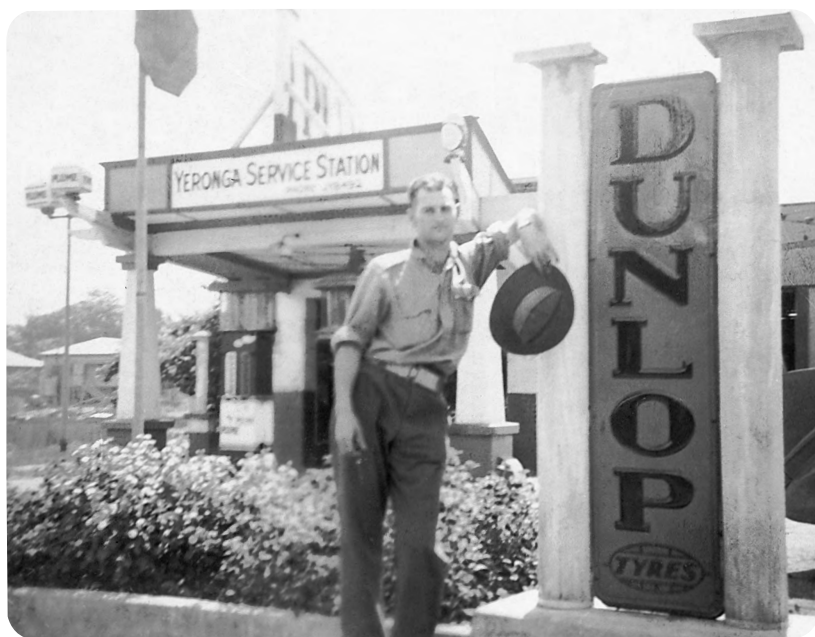
We had a terrible time organising the wedding because I had to get Dad's permission with me not being 21. We went up from Brisbane on the train, changed to a railmotor – they let us off the railmotor right near the property – and walked to the farm at night. We walked to the farm to ask Dad to sign the forms because I was only 20.

We got back on the train the next day and we went to see the minister in Brisbane. He finds out that Dad had custody of me through the Court of Rockhampton (because of the divorce), and tells us we need a second signature on the marriage licence. Dad had already signed giving consent, but because he had custody of me he had to sign twice. So the next night Ned and I are on the train again. We only got back to Brisbane the second time on the morning we were married. And it's on the bottom of my marriage licence – through the Court of Rockhampton.

Ned and I didn't have a reception. We came straight back to his parents' service station at Yeronga and started working. And we didn't have a honeymoon. We never really had anything, just a bed at his parents' place. That's where we spent our honeymoon – four nights in the spare room at the back. That was our honeymoon. We never had much privacy, it was wartime.

Ned was with us for a few days and then he had to rejoin his battalion. I stayed at the service station until Dad said he needed me on the farm, so I went home to Monto. We stayed again at Grandma Flewell's at Yeronga when Ned came back AWL in the November.

I'VE STILL GOT Ned's little wedding ring... look... and I still wear it. A little white one, a wartime one.



1. Ned's mother, Lou.





**Opposite top:** Jack Woodbridge.  
[Glen Woodbridge, WB01, July 1949]

**Opposite bottom:** Ned outside the Yeronga  
Service Station owned by his parents.  
Ned and Dawn spent their honeymoon  
in a room at the back.  
[Ned, NF72, March 1943]

**Right:** Ned and Dawn on their wedding day.  
On his uniform, Ned has the purple  
T-patch of the 9th Division.  
[Dawn, DF60, 13/3/1943]

Darling,  
as for explaining why everything would be worse  
if you were to join the services and I was out –  
remember, Sweet,  
that for over three years I've been with men I call my cobbers.  
We've been places  
and seen things together,  
done things together.

Darling,  
if I was out of the army  
I'd be thinking of the others that were still carrying on,  
and I would need something worthwhile,  
some reason – a good one – to keep me going.  
And if you weren't there with me in civilian life, Darling,  
I wouldn't have any reason at all to be out of the army.

It gets a hold on one.  
Not so much the army itself,  
but the men you have fought with,  
and it always seems to call.  
I'm no hero, Sweet, but you get that feeling.



## ***Letters 1943 – 1944***



AFTER HIS MARRIAGE, Ned's letters become less interesting, taken up as they are with concerns about his knee injury, trying to get out of the army, and being a proud husband and father.

His first child, Deric, was born in August 1944 after Ned went AWL in November 1943 and Dawn became pregnant.

Only a smattering of the remaining letters are reproduced here.

*Sunday, 4 April 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Precious, I've arrived at my destination<sup>1</sup> at last and have been put on a job already, pitching tents about 4 miles away from our camp. We didn't have much of a trip up – four days on the train. Rather tiring and very dirty. We were very pleased to get into a camp again and have a good sleep. It looks as if we'll be up here quite a while. The wet season's over, luckily, though it's still rather showery.

Darling, I'll close this. We're camped about 1½ miles from the Barron River. I haven't been down yet, but some of the lads say it's okay.

Well, cheerio, Sweet Heart, all my love.

*Yours forever*  
*NED*

*Thursday, 8 April 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Sweetest, how is everything with you? Okay I hope. I haven't received a letter from you yet, but I'm hoping for one in the near future. Everything up here is okay. The last couple of nights a few of the lads, myself included, have been down fishing in the Barron River. We caught a few jewfish, enough for our breakfast. The river has a few nice spots for swimming and the lads certainly make use of them. They are about the only recreation we have here so far.

Dearest, how are things at home? Give them all my regards and look after yourself won't you, Sweet. I miss you, and am only waiting till we can be together again. I hope it won't be too long, don't you?

Cheerio, my Love. All my love and kisses.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
*NED*

*Thursday, 15 April 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Sweet Heart, I'm a very disappointed young husband at present. I haven't received any word from you since I left. Is there anything wrong, Dearest? Let's know if there is.

Things aren't so good up here. There's nowhere to go and nothing to do, though they're talking of getting a football team going, so that will occupy our time a little.

We went on a route march a few days ago. Eight hours of marching over hills, through creeks and scrub. It's about the first time I've been knocked up in the army and I wasn't the only one. They gave us a day on the river next day to recuperate and do our washing.

Well, my Darling, they tell us we won't get any leave till we've been here six months, but nobody thinks we will be here that long.

I miss you, Love. I guess I'm about the most homesick lad here. I'd give all I have to be back with you, Sweet Heart, and to hold you in my arms again. Oh, Darling, I wish this blasted war was over and we were together. Things would be just perfect, wouldn't they, Sweet. Life's hardly worth living without you. Knowing that you are waiting for me is about all that keeps me going.

I've lost all interest in the army now. The way we are treated back here in Aussie, well, it's disgraceful, and I'm not the only one that thinks so either. The AIF stinks and they show little concern for us. The only time we're worth anything is when things look tough. "Oh, send the AIF, they'll do the job, they love their country". But that love's getting a little strained now, and if things don't brighten up, well, there's no telling.

By the way, Dearest, I don't want you to send any tobacco up as I'm trying to cut it out, but thanks very much all the same.

Hoping this finds you well, Sweet.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
*NED*

*Sunday, 9 May 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Thanks ever so much for your extra-loving letter I received today, Precious. Everything's just the same up here. Four of the lads and myself have been fishing up the river. Left midday yesterday and arrived back midday today. We caught some fish and had a fish supper about 10 o'clock and then rolled into our blankets. Quite an enjoyable time was had by all, and anyway, it broke the monotony of things.

Darling, can you send a writing pad up? Paper is very scarce here. This is the last page I've got and I have to write to Mum yet. I received a letter from her also today.

Well, Love, this Wednesday is exactly four years since we met. As you say, Sweet Heart, a lot has happened and a lot of our plans have been changed, but at least one of our dreams has come true, Darling. A lot more will, too, before long, please God.

By the way, Sweetest, what about making me a cake and sending it up for my birthday?

Well, Darling, it's getting dark now so I'll have to close this soon.

I've just had my first smoke for two days, Sweet. Not bad going for me, is it. I only have one now and again.

Well, my precious loving wife, I'll say cheerio. All my love and kisses to you.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
*NED*

**Opposite left:** Ned and Dawn on their wedding day, on the steps of the Methodist Church, Roma St, Brisbane.  
[Dawn, DF06, 13/3/1943]

**Opposite right:** Ned and Dawn outside their room at the Yeronga Service Station.  
[Ned, NF67, 13/3/1943]

1. Ned's destination was the training camp at Kairi, about 6 miles from Atherton on the Atherton Tablelands.



*Sunday, 20 June 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Sweet, I received your very welcome letter last Thursday, two in two days. It was quite a surprise.

I am in hospital, Darling. Nothing serious, so don't worry. I put my knee out playing football on Friday, worse luck.

Well, Precious, there's very little news I can tell you. What I would like to say is only for your eyes, so I can't put it here.

It looks as if I won't fill this page, Sweet. I hope you don't mind. I just can't seem to concentrate on writing at present.

It's very quiet here and there's nothing to do. I've been playing dominoes all morning, that's how bad it is. One thing that is a pleasure is sleeping between sheets again. It made me think of you.

Well, Darling, I'll have to close this. Cheerio, Love. All my love and kisses to you.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED



*Saturday, 26 June 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Thanks for your very welcome letter I received this morning, Darling. I was very pleased to get it. I also received one from Mother yesterday, the first for quite some time.

Well, Precious, I'm still in hospital. I haven't the faintest idea how long I'll be here, either. They put my knee in plaster last Tuesday, but I can still hobble round and am not confined to bed, which is one consolation anyway; and I'm having a rest, which is another.

Well, Darling, if you could see me in hospital blues, which I'm glad you can't, you would die laughing. The trousers are about three sizes too small, and the coat's about the same, so I've dispensed with it and wear that rather nice pullover you sent me.

I'm doing quite a bit of reading and also playing bridge a lot to help fill in the time; otherwise there's nothing much to keep ourselves occupied. I generally go to the pictures every second night, though the last couple of shows that have been on I've seen before. It's still somewhere to go and passes the time away.

Well, my Love, there's not much news left to tell you about, except how much I miss you and how much I love you. It will be great to be together again, won't it. I love you, Darling and I get very lonely, too. Sometimes I get very blue and would give the army away and go down to you AWL, but things have tightened up and there's not much chance of doing it.

I'll say cheerio, Precious. All my love to you, Darling.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

*Wednesday, 7 July 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Thanks, Precious, for your very loving letter I received this morning. I also got one from Mother this afternoon, so I'm in the news today, eh.

Well, Precious, I'm still laid up. Matter of fact, I've been in bed since Monday and I don't care for the life much. Lying in bed 24 hours a day isn't at all to my liking. It mightn't be so bad if you could come and cheer me up a couple of times a day, but that's impossible isn't it. I guess I'll just have to put up with it.

I'm afraid, Sweet Heart, if I was left a widower I wouldn't know what to do. I'd feel lost and wouldn't care what happened to me. Don't forget, Darling, I thought I had lost you once before and that's how I felt then. I know I wished then that I hadn't come out of the big show<sup>1</sup>, but as I did come out I didn't care a damn what was going to happen next.

Darling, as for explaining why everything would be worse if you were to join the services and I was out – remember, Sweet, that for over three years I've been with men I call my cobbles. We've been places and seen things together, done things together. Darling, if I was out of the army I'd be thinking of the others that were still carrying on, and I would need something worthwhile, some reason – a good one – to keep me going. And if you weren't there with me in civilian life, Darling, I wouldn't have any reason at all to be out of the army. It gets a hold on one. Not so much the army itself, but the men you have fought with, and it always seems to call. I'm no hero, Sweet, but you get that feeling.

Do you understand now, Darling? I'll say cheerio, I hope everything is okay down there. I'm always thinking of you, Precious.

*Wednesday, 14 July 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Precious, I'm afraid I missed writing to you on Sunday. I'm sorry, Sweetest, you will be thinking that I disapprove of you joining up. Even if I did, you would still get your own way in the end, wouldn't you, Darling.

I've received three letters from you in the last two days, Precious, and it made me feel very happy as I hadn't heard from you for a little over a week.

Well, I'm out of bed again. Have been for two or three days now, and also have my leg out of plaster. The leg has improved a lot but is still rather swollen. I've been in here nearly four weeks now and I'm hoping I'll be out soon.

You say you miss me and wish we could be together again. If only we were, Darling, I would be the happiest man on earth. I think I'll go mad if I don't see you soon, I miss you so much.

I'll have to finish this now, my Precious. All my love and kisses to you, Darling. My thoughts are always of you. Cheerio.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

*Tuesday, 17 August 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Still no letters, Darling. God knows just where they are going. I'm afraid I'm not getting any. I'm sorry, Dearest, if I haven't been writing as often as I promised you I would, but I've been hoping to hear from you.

It's just a week today, Sweet Heart, since I left hospital, and my knee is getting worse again. I've been over to see the doctor twice since I've landed in this camp, and now I'm waiting till Friday to see how things are. If it's not any better I'll see about getting back to hospital again and see if they can fix it up okay this time. I can't march or carry anything heavy as it won't stand it.

Love, if things don't go right soon, I'm afraid I'll have to come and see you and take the consequences. I'm no good for a fighting unit till the old knee comes right, and I won't be leaving Aussie till it does.

I'll have to close this now, Darling, as all the boys have gone to bed. Cheerio, Darling. All my love and kisses to the sweetest wife in the world.

NED

*All my Love & Kisses  
From your ever loving Husband  
NED*

1. Big show: the Battle of El Alamein. See letter, 15/12/1942, p185.



*Sunday, 22 August 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Precious, I've received three letters and a telegram since last writing to you, the first for over four weeks, so you can guess how pleased I was. All the letters had been up to the battalion and back to hospital, then finally caught up with me here.

I went over to the doc on Friday and he put me down for a consultation on my knee, so I suppose I'll be here another couple of weeks yet, worse luck.

Darling, I'm afraid leave is rather out of the question right now. That is, legal leave. I've been thinking of coming down to see you quite a lot lately and then take the consequences, but now I'll wait till I get the results of my consultation and then see how things are. I'm afraid I'll have to go back to hospital and have an operation if it doesn't improve. Maybe I'll get leave then, if I've any luck. If not, well, I've already said what I'll do.

You are not the only one who wishes I would get a discharge. I do myself, Sweetest, just so I could be with my adorable wife all the time. But I guess I wasn't born under the right star, eh.

Well, my precious Sweet Heart, I'll have to close this. Gee, Darling, I miss you. It nearly drives me mad to think we are so far apart. I love you so much I'd do nearly anything to be with you again.

Cheerio, my Love. All my love and kisses to the most adorable wife in the world.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

**Right:** Ned at the Barron River, Atherton Tablelands. The 2/15th Battalion spent April till early July training on the Tablelands, and then embarked for Milne Bay, New Guinea on 1 August. Ned was in hospital and had to remain behind. He had no further involvement with the 2/15th.

[Ned, NF83, 1943]

*Sunday, 29 August 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Precious, by the time you receive this letter I'll be back in hospital again, worse luck. I went down to the hospital on Friday for my consultation and was told to go back to camp and be ready to be admitted as a patient on Monday or Tuesday. So, Sweet Heart, it looks as if I won't be seeing you for another two months or so now.

When I get to hospital, Darling, I'll wire you my address. Don't use my battalion address, just the hospital address, otherwise it will go chasing me all over the Pacific like the others. I'll be glad when I get to a place and stop for a while so my mail can catch up.

Give my regards to all down there, Sweetest, and wish them all the best for me. Cheerio, Darling. All my love and kisses.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

*Tuesday, 31 August 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Precious, I've arrived in hospital again and I'm a bed patient. I don't like being in bed and not allowed up on any excuse. I landed in here yesterday morning and as yet haven't the faintest idea just what they intend to do, or how long I'll be here. I really hope they decide quickly and get it over with and let me out. It can't be soon enough for me, Sweet Heart, as the sooner I'm out the sooner I'll see you again.

Well, there isn't any other news. All my love and kisses to you, Darling. I'm always thinking of you and praying we'll be together again soon.

*Goodnight*  
Love NED

P.S. By the way, Darling, it's Mother's birthday on the fifth. Will you buy her a present for us both, Sweetest? Cheerio again, my darling wife.

*Lots of love*  
NED

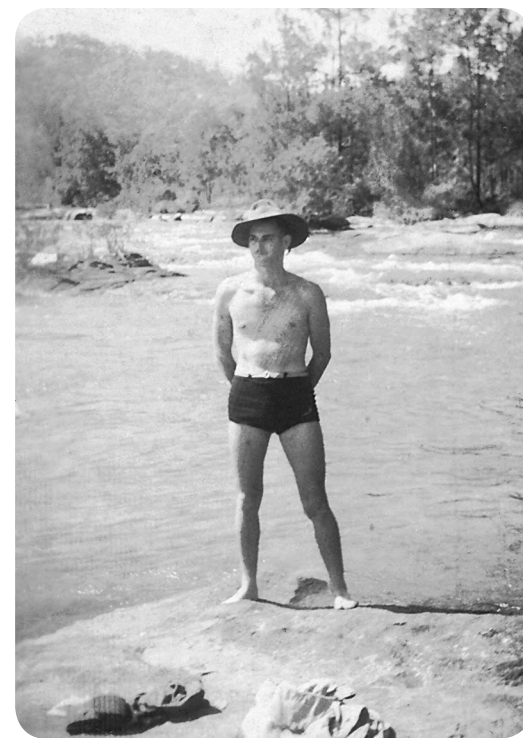
*Sunday, 12 September 1943*

MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Precious, yesterday I received another very welcome letter from you, and today, our wedding photo. It's very lovely Darling. It's a great photo of you and I like it very much. I had nearly forgotten how lovely you looked, Sweet Heart. All the sisters and the chaps in the ward also think you look lovely, Darling, and they say it's one of the best wedding photos they have seen. I'm beginning to feel very proud and am thinking what a lucky guy I am. Thanks for sending it up.

Well, my precious Darling, it's six months since the big day and we have had only about 14 days together. It wasn't long was it, Darling, and it seems such a long time ago. I'll be the happiest man alive when we're together again. I'm hoping it's in the near future, don't you, Sweetest?

I'll have to say cheerio now. All my love and kisses to you, Darling. I'm always thinking about you and it makes me very blue. Give my regards to all down there. Cheerio, again Precious.

*From your ever-loving lonely husband*  
NED



*Tuesday, 21 September 1943*

MY DARLING WIFE – Received two of your ever welcome letters yesterday. Thanks ever so much, Darling. It cheers me up a lot to hear from you.

Sweetest, I'm out of hospital again. The doc says that I'll be okay again in a week, but I'm afraid he's rather an optimist, because I'm pretty sure it will take longer than that.

Cheerio, Sweet Heart. I wish I could tell you how much I love you and miss you, but I just can't put it on paper.

All my love and kisses, my adorable wife.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

*[undated, ~November 1943]*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Precious, how is everything? I hope you are not feeling too lonely and worrying about me too much. I don't know just how long I'll be here<sup>1</sup>. I don't think it will be too long. Here's hoping not, anyway.

Gee, Darling, I'm missing you. When I left I didn't think I would miss you quite so much, but being without you is like a little hell on earth. I suppose I'll settle down after a while, eh.

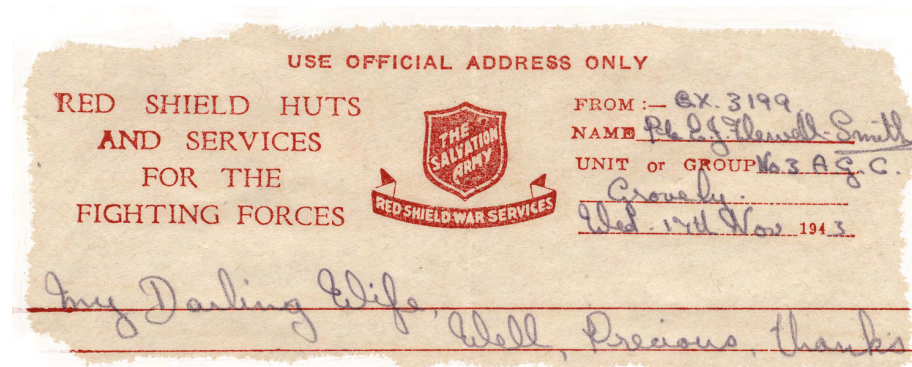
Well, Darling, things aren't so bad out here and I guess I'll survive. If you feel like coming out to see me, Sunday is visiting day between 2 and 4 o'clock. The boys tell me that to get out here you take a Newmarket tram to the terminus and then catch a bus for here. It leaves somewhere round 10 minutes to one, or so I'm told. You can come by train, but it's quite a walk from the nearest station.

Give my love to Mum and Dad and tell them not to worry about me. As I said before, I don't know what is going to happen next. I might be able to tell you more on Sunday if you come out.

Well, Sweetest, I'll have to close this as it's lights out in a minute. I had to borrow this paper tonight, so excuse me for not writing earlier and giving you a little more news.

Cheerio, Sweet Heart. All my love and kisses to my darling wife.

*From your loving husband*  
NED



ever so much for your letter and papers I received yesterday afternoon. They were quite a godsend.

I'm getting on okay, Sweet, but I haven't heard anything about my application to be placed under open arrest. The CO evidently wouldn't grant it, worse luck. Anyway, I've been working outside occasionally so things aren't too bad. It's a bit of a break.

Well, Precious, I think I'll still be here next Sunday. I haven't heard word otherwise yet. I had hopes of being under open arrest next time I saw you, but it doesn't look like it now, does it.

I can't think of anything else to write, Sweet, so I'll close this. Cheerio, my Darling. All my love and kisses.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED



1. Ned wrote this letter soon after he surrendered after going AWL to visit Dawn. He was under military arrest and being detained at Grovely Camp in Brisbane.

Above: The envelope which contained Ned's letter of 17/11/1943.



*Friday, 19 November 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Sweet Heart, I'm afraid I won't be seeing you for some time as I'm leaving here today. I'm going back up north somewhere. I don't know just where we are going, but I'll drop you a line as soon as I land.

I received your very welcome letter yesterday afternoon. Thanks Darling. It's great to get letters from you.

I'm sorry I'm leaving, Sweet, without seeing you again. I'm feeling in the blues properly, but at least we have our memories, haven't we.

Cheerio, my Precious. All my thoughts are of you.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

*Sunday, 28 November 1943*

MY DARLING WIFE – Just a short note, Darling, to let you know I'm quite okay but missing you very much. I'm still waiting for my trial to come off. I suppose it'll be a week or so yet, unless they hurry it along a bit, which I hope they do.

Well, Darling, there's not a bit of news up here to tell you about, so I'm afraid this will be a very short note.

Gee, Dearest, I'll be glad to get a letter from you again. The time seems to drag when I don't hear from you. I guess I'm a bit greedy, eh, seeing that it's not even three weeks since we were together. Anyway, I'm just living for the day when we will be together for keeps. What says you, Precious?

Well, Sweet, I'll have to close this as I've got to go back to work. I'm still working in the kitchen here. Cheerio. All my love and kisses to you. I miss you so much. I'm just dying for the day I'll see you again.

*From your ever-loving  
but lonely husband*  
NED

*Monday, 6 December 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Precious, no letter from you yet, though I don't really expect one for a day or so. I received a letter from Mother yesterday. She gave me a bit of news from down there and she wants me to promise not to go AWL again. What do you think, Precious? It was worth it, wasn't it?

I don't know about my knee – it's still giving me trouble. I've seen the doc here, but he didn't say anything much.

It doesn't look as if I'll see you at Christmas, does it, Sweet Heart. I hope you won't be too disappointed.

It's very hot up here, Sweets. Too darn hot for my liking. I like it cold and to have you to keep me warm. We'll catch up with those days sometime won't we, Sweet Heart. Let's hope the time's not far off, eh.

Well, Darling, news is very scarce here, not being able to go anywhere. I'll have a bit of news after my trial, won't I, Sweetest, even though it might not be the best.

By the way, I will only be allowed to write once a week when I'm doing my sentence, so don't worry if my letters aren't as regular as before.

I'll say cheerio, my Darling. All my love and kisses to you.

*From your ever-loving and lonely husband*  
NED

*Sunday, 12 December 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Thanks ever so much for your loving letter I received yesterday. I was very glad to get it and read the news<sup>1</sup>. Gee, Sweet Heart, I must be the proudest man in the world, a rooster on top of a sunrise wood heap. Are you happy about it Sweets? I am, and I'm praying you are too.

As for getting out of the army, Darling, if I thought your father could do anything I would say go right ahead. If you are willing to live on a farm, well, Sweetie, I'm more than willing.

Darling, it's 19 days since I arrived here, so I'm hoping things liven up a bit this week and I get my trial over and done with. I'll know where I stand then. This waiting isn't the best, I may say.

Next time you write, Sweetest, enclose a stamped envelope, a 4d stamp, as I can't get any here. Also, I think I told you I will be allowed to write only once a week when I get my sentence, so don't be disappointed if my letters stop for a while, will you, Precious.

Well, my Love, it looks as if I'll spend Christmas behind barbed wire. At least I'll be in Aussie, eh, which is something, I guess. There's no need to send me a Christmas cake, Darling, as they won't let me have it till my sentence is completed.

Gee, Precious, I hope the doc's right. Cheerio, Darling. All my love and kisses to you.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

*Thursday, 16 December 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – No letters from you, Precious, for nearly a week now. I am slightly disappointed at not hearing from you. I haven't heard from Mother either.

A few things have happened since my last letter. I left here on Monday for my DCM<sup>1</sup>, but wasn't tried till Tuesday afternoon. My sentence was only 28 days, so things aren't too bad, are they. I had a good defending officer and I should be a free man again by about the 11th January. I'll be here for Christmas, worse luck. Then on, I don't know where I'll be going.

I wish we were together again, Sweets. I miss you so much. I love you, Dearest, more than I can ever say. Cheerio, my darling Sweet Heart.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

1. Dawn was pregnant.  
2. DCM: District Court Martial.

***Don't you know what HOLLAND means?***

*Saturday, 18 December 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Thanks, my Darling, for your two very welcome letters I received yesterday afternoon. Gee, Precious, I was pleased to hear from you again. I was wondering what was the matter.

I haven't seen those snaps yet, Sweets. I won't till I've finished my sentence as they don't allow certain things in here and are holding them till I get out. There's not much use sending anything to me till I leave here, Sweet. You could, but I won't get them till I get out of here. Anyway, do as you please, Sweetest.

Don't you know what HOLLAND means, Darling? Well, it's Hope Our Love Lasts And Never Dies. Don't you, Sweet Heart? Because I do.

No need to send me any presents for Christmas, Darling, as I don't need anything except for you to keep loving me – and you will, won't you, Sweets? As for money, I don't need any. You will be needing it more than I if things are true, eh, Darling.

I'll say cheerio. I'm missing you very much, Sweet. I'm always thinking of you and wondering how you are and what you are doing. Cheerio again. All my love and kisses to you.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
*NED*

*Tuesday, 21 December 1943*

TO MY DARLING WIFE – Just a note, Precious, to let you know I'm still okay. I wish I could be with you, Darling. I'm always thinking and wondering just how you are.

Gee, Sweet Heart, I wish I could be with you for Xmas. We haven't spent one together yet, have we. Anyway, Sweetest, let's hope we'll be reunited for keeps early in the New Year.

Well, Darling, here's wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. I haven't the faintest idea just how I'll spend mine, but it will be in here.

I'll say cheerio, my precious Sweet Heart. All my love and kisses to you.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
*NED*



**Left:** The envelope which contained Ned's letter of 18/12/1943.

**Below:** One of Ned's envelopes with "Holland" on the back (5/5/1944).





*Saturday, 15 January 1944*

TO MY DARLING BELOVED WIFE – Well, Sweet Heart, just another line to let you know I'm quite okay and thinking very much of you. How are you, Sweets? Everything okay still? I'm hoping so, anyway. I don't suppose I'll hear from you for a fortnight at least, Darling, as I haven't any address you can write to. Don't address any letters here as I'll have left by the time you receive this letter. I suppose you can guess where I'm going, but I'll let you know my address for sure when I reach my destination.

There's not much news to tell you about, Dearest. It's very hot here, worse luck, but I suppose there's worse places, eh – and one that's a lot better, too. You know where that one is, don't you, my Darling.

I met a chap out of Clive's unit last night. He said he knew Clive very well. He heard my name and came over to see if I was a relative of Clive's and if I knew anything about the POWs. I didn't get any information about Clive as he knew no more than I did, only that most were captured on that island of Ambon.

Well, Precious, now that I've had a few square meals and seen a few pictures and also got my smokes back, nearly everything's okay again. All I need now is you, Sweet, to make things complete.

Gee, if I could only hold you in my arms again, Darling, I would be very happy, the happiest man in the world.

I'm going to write to your father, Sweetest and see if he'll try to get me out to help him on the farm. Will that suit you, Darling? He said for me to make the first move, but he'll have to do that as I can't do much from this end yet, not till I know what he's got planned for me – if he can get me out.

I've enclosed two pieces out of the newspaper so you will understand why he has to apply for me. You can show them to him if he doesn't understand.

Well, precious Love, I'll have to say cheerio. I haven't any more news and I've got to write to your father before I knock off. I don't know just what to say to him, but you can try and explain to him that I want to get out of the army and back on the land. That is, of course, if that's what you would like. It is, isn't it, Sweet?

All my love and kisses to you, my Darling.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

**Right:** Two cuttings from the *Cairns Post* of 12/1/1944 enclosed by Ned with the above letter.

## RELEASES FROM ARMY FOR RURAL EMPLOYMENT.

### AT RATE CONTEMPLATED.

SYDNEY, January 11.

The Minister for the Army (Mr. F. M. Forde) said to-day that there was the utmost co-operation between the Army Department and the man-power authorities in carrying out the Government's scheme to discharge 20,000 serving soldiers for work in rural and other industries.

The Director-General of Man-power (Mr. W. C. Wurth) had told him that his department had received every assistance from the army authorities and he was satisfied that the utmost expedition is being used by the army in making the discharges.

Mr. Forde added: "I assured the public some time ago that the army would carry out the instruction of the War Cabinet and release 4000 men by the end of 1943 and 2000 a month afterwards. On December 31 the number of soldiers approved for discharge had reached 4000, and to January 8 the figure had reached 4413. This means that the army is now discharging men for rural and other industries at the rate originally contemplated, and even faster. Discharges are being made on the selective system based on the nominations by the farmers themselves. This method was suggested by the Director-General of Man-power with the concurrence of the Food Production Department. Since the beginning of the war 8000 men discharged from the forces have returned to rural work to preserve the natural increase in rural production."

Mr. Forde said: "The army is continually releasing men for temporary periods for seasonal rural work and other purposes. At present the number of temporary releases is 4000, and this number is increasing."

"In the case of releases from the Army the applicant farmer guarantees that the man asked for is an experienced farm worker. Careful attention is being paid by the Manpower Directorate to ensure that the 20,000 men to be released from munitions bloc have qualifications required for the work they are to undertake."

*Tuesday, 8 February 1944*

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Received your very welcome letter on Sunday, Sweets, also your telegram yesterday. I suppose you collected a few letters when you arrived at Clermont<sup>1</sup>.

Well, Dearest, I haven't received any word from the unit about leave yet, but am hoping to in the near future. Of course it mightn't be granted, but I'm hoping for the best.

Nothing of interest had been happening up here, Sweets. I haven't been anywhere for the last week or so, I'm saving up. The boys are doing a lot of talking here tonight and are doing their best to annoy me, so I'll close this for tonight. Cheerio, Darling.

*Sweet dreams  
Love NED*

WELL, DARLING, back again. I'm afraid I haven't much to write about. I received a letter from Mother a few days back. Everything is okay down there, but I suppose she has written to you and told you all the news.

How are you feeling, Sweets? Quite okay? Gee, I feel proud. I hope I get this leave so I can be with you again.

Darling, I don't think I can ring you from here. There's a restriction on phone calls up this way. I'm sorry, Sweets. I'll try and find out for sure.

I haven't heard from your father yet. Did you give him my address? Maybe he won't do what I asked him, eh, about getting me out.

Look after yourself, Precious, and give my regards to all out there. Cheerio, my Darling. All my love and kisses to you.

*From your ever-loving husband  
NED*

*Sunday, 20 February 1944*

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Well, Dearest, no word from you this week. I'm very disappointed. Is there anything wrong? Let's know please, Darling, if there is, won't you.

It's been drizzling rain here all afternoon. The weather is damn near as miserable as I am. Nothing seems to be going right for me lately.

News is still very scarce here, Sweets. Nothing doing, though plenty of work, worse luck. I went into town yesterday. Had a day out with a couple of cobbers and had a bit

too much to drink (I hope you don't mind), and finished up with a black eye. Went to the flicks, but they weren't the best. I had a good time, taking everything into consideration, black eye and all.

How are you enjoying Clermont, Darling? Is it a nice place? I hope I can get down. I'm just dying to see you again and to hold you close, Sweetest. I feel like going on another AWL tour.

Gee, Darling, I hope everything is going to turn out okay. By the way, my Princess, what are the names going to be? Picked out any yet?

I'm going to bed now, Sweets, to dream about you and when we'll be together for keeps. I won't post this till tomorrow night, till I see if I get another letter from you. I'll be very disappointed if don't, Darling.

Sweet Dreams, my most adorable wife.

*From yours ever  
NED*

WELL, DARLING, no letters today for me, worse luck. Things are sure in a bad way. It's raining again as usual. I suppose you are getting plenty of rain down there too, Sweets, eh. I would just love to be with you listening to the rain. It always makes me think of you and home.

Gee it would be great to be together again. I feel like tearing everything to pieces when I think of you down there and me not being able to get down.

Look after yourself, my Darling, won't you, and don't worry too much. All my love and kisses to you, my most dearest wife.

*From your ever-loving  
but lonely  
NED*

*Thursday, 2 March 1944*

MY DARLING SWEET HEART – No letters from you this week, Sweets. I really expected one today, but was disappointed. Better luck tomorrow, I hope.

I received a letter from your father on Tuesday and he has started things going. I only hope now that he is successful. Gee, Dearest, it will be grand, won't it. I'll know in a couple of months or so. Anyway, here's hoping for the best, eh.

Well, my Precious, how are you keeping? Looking after yourself I hope. I wish I could be with you, Darling.

My knee's still not the best. The doc thinks he can fix it up, so I'm still in camp. Things are very slow here, as you can guess. Nothing much to do, and now I can't leave here at all on account of my knee.

I went to the flicks last night. They were held in camp. It was the worst show I've seen in years.

By the way, I'm sending this ordinary mail, so let me know how much difference in time there is between it and air mail.

Well, Sweetest, I haven't much more to say. Give my regards to Marj, Max and the kids. I'll have to close as it's past my bedtime. Cheerio. All my love and kisses to the most adorable wife in the world.

*From your ever-loving husband  
NED*



1. Dawn was in Clermont visiting Ned's sister, Marj, and her husband, Max Burns.



*Sunday, 5 March 1944*

MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Thanks for your very welcome letter I received this morning. I was very pleased to get it as it's the first one I've had from you for a week. I suppose I'll get another one or two from you tomorrow, and then none for another week. I guess I can't growl as long as I get them. That's the main thing isn't it, Sweetest.

I haven't much news to impart to you, Darling. I haven't been any further than 300 yards from my tent all week, worse luck.

My knee hasn't improved much and the doc says not to walk on it anymore than I can help. I wish he would either fix it up or send me to hospital where they can do something about it. At least they did a better job with it last time than this chap is doing here now.

I received a letter from Mother a couple of days back, but I suppose she gave you all the news. She mentioned you and Marj ringing up.

Darling, still no word from the unit about my leave. They must have wiped it, unless the telegram didn't get through. Anyway, I'm about past caring. There's only one thing keeping me here – I don't want to spoil my chance for a release. Let's hope I have a bit of luck in that direction as I don't seem to have much anywhere else, do I.

Gee, Dearest, I miss you. I'll be the happiest man on earth when we're together again. I love you so much.

Well, my precious Sweet Heart, I'm just about stuck for news. I'll close this, Sweetest, and go to bed and dream about you. It's about the only pleasure I have now. Look after yourself, Darling, won't you.

Cheerio, Darling. Give my regards to Marj, Max and the kids. All my love and kisses to my most adorable wife.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

*Saturday, 20 May 1944*

MY DARLING SWEET HEART – thanks very much for your very welcome letter I received this morning. I was pleased to hear from you again, Sweets. If I got a letter from you each day I still wouldn't be satisfied. I love you so much and miss you such a lot.

Everything up here is just the same and there's not much news to write about. I'm going into the pictures in town tonight. Walt Disney's *Bambi* is on and I would like to see it. Some of the lads here went to the races today, but I haven't enough money to spend on horses.

It's exactly four years today, Darling, since I joined up. Four years too long, isn't it. I had two pots of beer last night to celebrate. I must be improving eh, Sweet – only two.

Well, my Darling, I've about had it and only one page written. Anyway, it's nearly mess time so I'll have to close this till next letter. Give my regards to all up there, please.

Oh, I didn't do too well at the shooting the other day.

Well, cheerio, Sweet Heart. I hope to see you soon. All my love and kisses to you my precious sweet heart wife.

*From your most adoring husband*  
NED

*Tuesday, 4 July 1944*

MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Well, Precious, I've done it again. Not nearly as bad as it was before, but bad enough.

It happened yesterday afternoon. A few of the lads and myself were kicking the football about and I ran to catch it. My knee just gave way, so I had to report it as I could hardly walk and now I'm in here. I don't know if I'll be staying or going to one of the hospitals, so don't address letters here unless I send you a wire telling you to, Sweet.

I've just had my temperature and pulse taken and they tell me I won't die yet a while.

WELL, SWEETS, I've had my knee X-rayed and put into plaster, but don't know what the results are or what they are going to do.

I've received five letters from you since I've landed back, Darling. I suppose it will be a few days more now till I hear from you as your letters will have to chase me round.

How are you keeping, my Sweetest? Everything okay still, I hope. I'm afraid there's no chance of me getting down now. The only way anyone can get compassionate leave is to get a certificate from a doctor to say the person sick is so bad that they need someone close to help pull the person through, or so they told me back at the battalion. I hope you understand what I'm trying to explain, Darling.

I'll have to say cheerio. Give my regards to all down there. All my love and kisses to you, dearest Sweet Heart.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

*Thursday, 6 July 1944*

MY DARLING WIFE – Well, My Darling, I'm back in hospital. Landed here last night. They have me in bed at present; for a couple of days the doc says. I hope it's no longer as I hate not being able to get up. I wouldn't mind if I could get out on crutches, but they won't even allow that.

I haven't the faintest idea what they are going to do about my knee. I don't suppose I'll know till they do it. Anyway, they like to keep everything secret. One thing – I've got rid of the plaster and my knee's only bandaged now, thank goodness. The plaster cast was a bit too heavy, I'd say. I think I lost about a stone just carrying it around the short time I had it on.

Well, my Love, how are you getting on? Still okay? I suppose you'll be going to hospital any day now. I wish I could be with you, Dearest. I'm wondering all the time how you are and what you are doing.

There's very little news. Things are very slow here. The wireless is going all the time and it helps to break the monotony a little, but it makes me long to be near you, Dearest, especially when they play music.

Gee, Sweet, I'd give anything to hold you in my arms again.

I'll say cheerio, my adorable wife. All my love and kisses to you, and may God look after you and ours in the near future. Remember, I'm thinking of you, Darling.

*From your ever-loving husband*  
NED

*QX3199, Pte E.J. Flewell-Smith  
Ward 2, 1st Aust. Ortho Hospital  
Toowoomba  
Tuesday, 8 August 1944*

TO MY DARLING SWEET HEART – I received your very welcome telegram last night, Sweets. Gee I was glad to hear from you, and that you were both doing well. I just can't express my feelings, Darling, but I'll bet I'm the proudest husband in this hospital today. I'm a bit peeved I can't be there to see you both. What does he look like? I'm starting to feel happy again, now, Precious. I've been a bit worried the last month or so.

I'm in bed writing this, Sweet Heart. I've had my leg shaved and prepared today and I go under the op tomorrow sometime. I'm just hating the thought of staying in bed for the next fortnight. I think it will drive me crazy. I don't mind the op so bad, it's just the bed I'm crooked on. But I guess I'll get over it, eh.

Do you think you could manage to come down, Darling, before I leave here? They say I'll be here at least three months.

I've got very little news to tell you, my Darling. Give my regards to all up there. Cheerio, my precious wife. All my love and kisses to you and Deric.

*From your ever-loving husband  
NED*

*Saturday, 19 August 1944*

MY DARLING WIFE – Well, Sweet Heart, just a short note to let you know I'm still okay and in the land of the living. I received your loving letter yesterday, Darling. It's great to get letters from you, Sweetest. It helps make things worthwhile.

I haven't much news to tell you, Precious. I get out of bed next Wednesday, thank goodness. Only another three days.

I got the material for your slippers tonight; a light green. I hope you will like them.

I expected the doc to take the stitches out of my leg today. The sisters said he was going to, but he didn't do it, so I've still got them in.

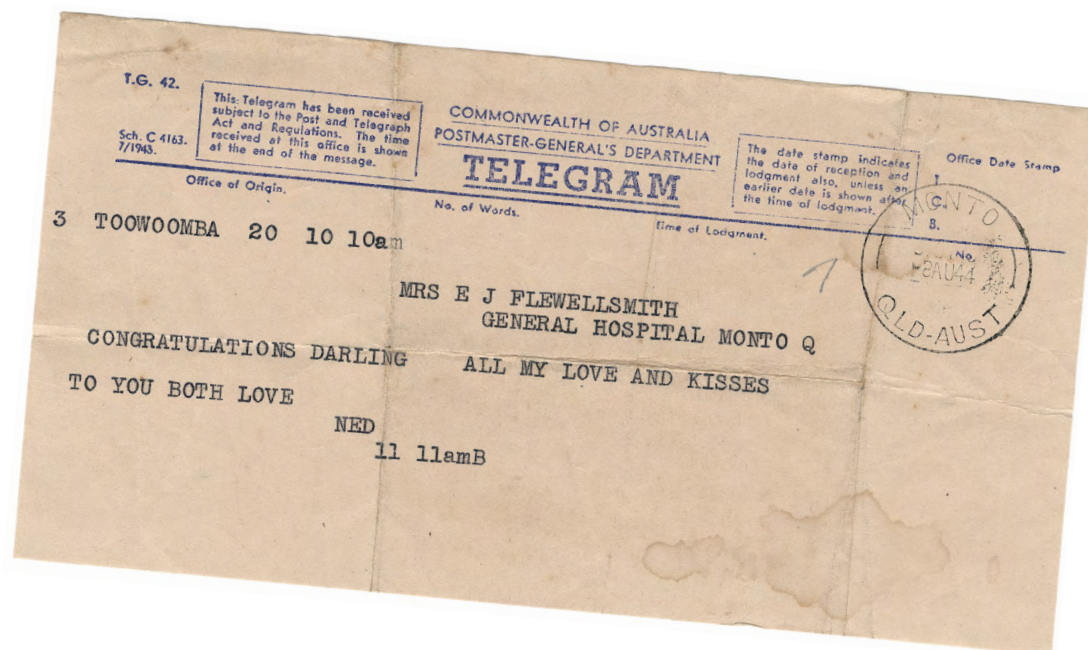
Well, Precious, have you thought about coming down when you are well enough to travel? Or don't you think you could make it.

How are you both, Sweets? Is Deric feeding okay? I'm just dying to see both of you, Darling. It can't be soon enough.

Well, my Love, I'll say cheerio. All my love and kisses to you and Deric, my darling wife.

*From your ever-loving husband  
NED*

***Is Deric feeding okay?***



*Monday, 21 August 1944*

MY DARLING SWEET HEART – Received your very welcome letter this morning, and also, this afternoon, that parcel of yours you sent. Thank you, Sweetest, very much. Was the writing pad meant as a hint, Precious? Anyway, Sweet, it was a swell parcel.

Well, Darling, I suppose you are home now. Are you glad? I'll bet, eh. As for my bed, Dearest, I haven't any complaints. It's a good soft one, a special one of rubber, so I'm luckier than you as regards that. Tomorrow will be my last day in it.

I've nearly finished your slippers, Dearest. To be honest, I don't know how they will suit you. I don't think they are such a good job, but the boys seem to think they're okay. Anyway, I'll let you decide.

Well, my Darling, Deric is a fortnight old today. I wonder how old he will be before I see him. I hope he is behaving himself. I'm just dying to see you both.

I haven't heard from Mum for a week now. She was going to come up and see me, but hasn't arrived yet and I'll be out of bed tomorrow.

Well, my precious Darling, news is very scarce here so I'll say cheerio. All my love and kisses and a great big hug for you both, Sweet Heart.

*From your ever-loving husband  
NED*









**Opposite top:** Dawn, Ned, Clive, Deric in front of "Morry" at the farm house, Monto district, before they left for Clermont to work for Max Burns.  
[Dawn, DF57, 1947]

**Opposite bottom:** Ambulance Ball, Charters Towers.  
From left:  
Max Burns  
Marj Burns (Ned's sister)  
Bill Kirk (worked for Max as a tanksinker)  
Mrs Murray (owned the Commercial Hotel after Max)  
Ned  
Dawn  
Ron Berryman.  
[Dawn, DF65, 2/7/1948]

**Left:** Dawn and Ned in Brisbane dressed for tennis, with Clive (left) and Deric.  
[Dawn, DF83, 1946]



## The Macrossan Smash



NED REALLY SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN IN THE ARMY. He had osteomyelitis in his leg and he shouldn't have gone to the war. We might have been better off if Ned had never enlisted, but it wouldn't have changed fate I suppose.

When he came back he was a winger on the football team and he did his knee in. He was sent to an army hospital in Toowoomba (they'd taken over a girl's college), and he had his operation there two days after Deric was born in Monto, 7 August 1944.

I think Dad spoke for Ned to get him out of the army. You could be released from service if you had a job on a farm to go to. And that's what happened with Ned. He was discharged in November 1944 and we went and lived on a property that Dad bought, next door to his home farm.

Deric was born from the home farm while Ned was still in the army. The next year, after we'd moved to the farm next door, I had Clive.

We didn't go straight to the farm when Ned got out of the army. He did three months of an agricultural course at Gatton College, while I stayed with his parents at Brighton, in the little house "Ambon".

We were on the farm during that awful drought in 1947. Marj wrote and said that Max was needing help with his earthmoving, so we packed everything we owned into our little Morris and went to Clermont. Max was just finishing a job there, and then all of us went out west to a property called Clio, tanksinking. We were only there a few months. After that we came back to Charters Towers and Max built those ovals at All Souls. This would be near the end of '47.

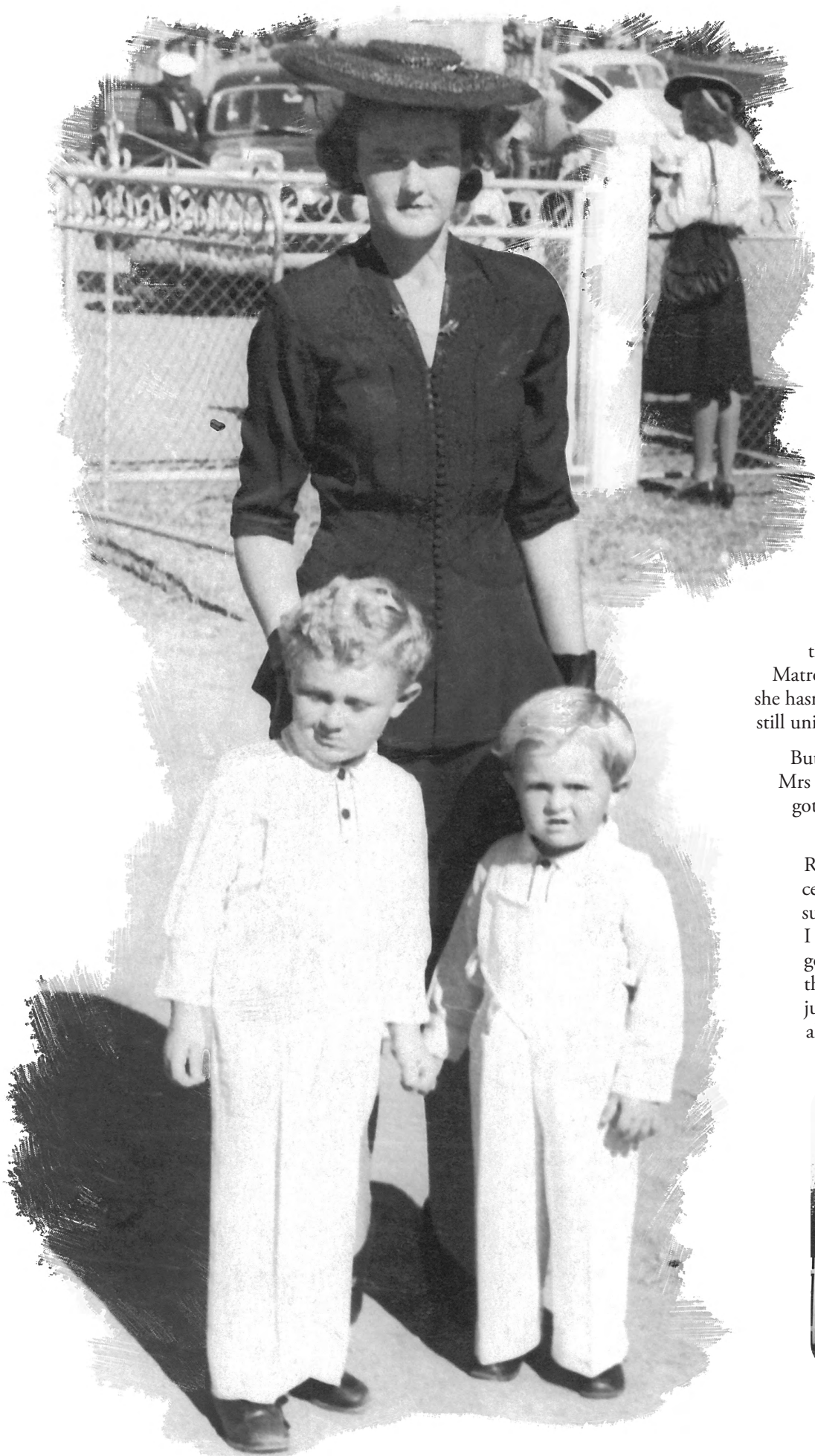
While we were camped at All Souls working on the ovals, Max went into town one day and came back and said: "I've bought a hotel".

"What're you going to do with a hotel?" asked Marj. "We'll put Ned and Dawn in it." I was 25 and I must have been about the youngest licensee in Queensland at the time. Marj and Max went back to Clio, and Ned and I were left to run the Commercial Hotel. But we weren't in there long. Just a couple of months until Marj took over.

I think Max sold the hotel about a year later – sold it to a Mrs Murray.







When we moved out of the hotel, Ned and I got a small house on the corner of Dean and Towers St. We were living there when Ned got the job at Selheim. He was a storeman. Every afternoon he'd come home in a truck with the other workers, and every afternoon the boys used to walk down to meet him on the corner. They'd fiddle around at the bus station, waiting. The bus used to come in – they called it a bus – the bus used to pull in at Husband's garage and Ned would walk the boys home.

This one particular day I noticed they were still down there and it was past time for the bus to arrive, so I got in the Morris and went and picked the boys up and drove around to Mrs Murray at the Commercial Hotel. I said to her: "The bus is not in. I wonder if anything's happened?" She twigged right away and put the fear of God into me straight off when she said: "I think you should go up to the hospital".

So me and the little ones went up to the hospital. It was like a war zone: nurses rushing around with beds, and ambulances coming in, and people crowding. I waited the whole time till it was all over. Mrs Murray took the children home and then her and a detective came back. Mrs Murray said to the Matron: "Mrs Flewell-Smith's been sitting here all this time and she hasn't had any word", and the Matron said: "There's one body still unidentified in the morgue".

But they wouldn't let me identify Ned, so the detective and Mrs Murray went. She came back and said: "I'm sorry, but I've got to tell you..."

Ned wasn't damaged in the face or anything like that. Ruptured left ventricle of the heart is what's on the death certificate. But some of the others were badly hurt and I suppose they didn't think I should go to the hospital in case I saw them. But whatever had happened to Ned I wanted to go in and say hooray to him. And they wouldn't let me. No, they wouldn't. They could have covered the others over and just let me say goodbye to Ned, seeing that I wanted to. I've always wanted to. But no, I wasn't allowed.





**Opposite:** Dawn, Deric, Clive at the Charters Towers Show a few months before Ned's death.  
*[Dawn, DF66, 30/6/1948]*

**Opposite bottom:** "Morry" outside Ned and Dawn's home in Charters Towers. Children in the ute, from left: Clive, Lois (Dawn's niece), Deric.  
*[Dawn, DF72, 1948]*

**Right:** Macrossan Smash.  
*[Isabel Flewell-Smith, 108, Thursday, 16/9/1948]*

**Below:** Macrossan smash.  
*[Dawn, NF05, 16/9/1948]*





Ned was one of the nine men killed outright. Someone told me later that he survived the crash and they sat him up against one of the rocks. With his ruptured heart he might have been alive for a few minutes perhaps.

It makes you wonder about God. Why would he take Ned away? Why would he leave the boys without their father? Why would he do that? I was newly pregnant when Ned was killed, but I had a miscarriage before the funeral and lost the baby. Why would he allow that?

When I got home the boys were looking for Daddy. I gave both of them a shower and they were asking why Daddy wasn't home. I said... well, I don't remember what I said. They couldn't understand Ned wasn't coming home. It was so hard to tell them.

I've had to bring the boys up myself. I've been mum and dad to them, tried to do the best for them, went to work. I was determined no matter what happened that we'd manage, that we'd get there.

**Below:** Funeral in Charters Towers for the Macrossan smash victims.  
[Dawn, DF36, Saturday, 18/9/1948]

# 10 KILLED, 20 IN HOSPITAL

## R.A.A.F. TRANSPORT'S PLUNGE INTO RIVER BED

### WORST DISASTER IN LOCAL HISTORY

Ten people were killed and 27 injured, two critically, when an R.A.A.F. semi-trailer conveying to Charters Towers approximately 40 civilian employees who had just completed the day's work at No. 8 Stores Depot, R.A.A.F., Macrossan, overran the side of the traffic bridge over the Burdekin River at Macrossan late yesterday afternoon and crashed 15 feet into the dry, rocky river bed.

It is the worst disaster in local history. All the dead are Charters Towers people, as are most of the injured.

#### The death list is:—

Patrick James Hansen, 27, Vulture Street, married, clerk.  
Harold Williams, 32, Hackett Terrace, married, assistant storeman.  
Edgar Flewell-Smith, 28, Towers and Deane Streets, married, assistant storeman.  
Robert George Tait, 36, Boundary Street, single, assistant storeman.  
Joseph Richard Simpson, 31, Burdekin Street, married, caretaker.  
Thomas Henry Simpson, 27, Millichester Road, married, motor driver.  
Henry James Knudsen, Natal Downs Road, married, assistant storeman.  
John Herbert Delacour, 57, Enterprise Road, married, assistant storeman.  
Archibald Campbell, 42, Enterprise Road, married, laborer.  
Mervyn Harry Neumann, 26, York Street, single, assistant storeman.

The critically injured are: Susan Agnes May Turley, 20, Wilson Street, single, typist, and Walter George Thomas, 46, Alexander Creek, married, assistant storeman, both of whom suffered head injuries.

Every person on the vehicle received return the workers who, except for the hospital and who had been staying at injuries, ranging from broken limbs two girls aboard, were ex-service per-Fanning Downs Station, was one of







**Above:** Unidentified men standing near Ned's hearse at Charters Towers, waiting for the train to take the coffin to Mulgildie.  
[Dawn, DF19, 21/9/1948]



**Above:** Children at Charters Towers playing near "Morry" while waiting for Ned's hearse. From left: Clive, Butch Burns, Deric. The two women standing near the fence are Lou (Ned's mother, left) and Dawn.  
[Dawn, DF86, 21/9/1948]

**Opposite:** Cutting from the *Northern Miner*.  
[Dawn, NF05b, 17/9/1948]

**Below:** Macrossan Smash.  
[Bill Henderson, P128, 16/9/1948]





## A Soldier Laid to Rest

In the presence of a large and representative gathering of returned soldiers, business people and other citizens from all parts of the district, the body of Edgar Flewell-Smith was laid to rest in the Mulgildie Cemetery on Tuesday morning last.

The deceased lost his life in tragic circumstances when a R.A.A.F. trailer bus capsized over Macrossan Bridge, near Charters Towers on September 16. He was brought from Charters Towers by the Townsville train to Gladstone and was met by Messrs A. Hill (former treasurer of the Monto R.S.S.A.I.L.A. and life member of the sub-branch), members of the Gladstone R.S.S.A.I.L.A. and Mr. T. Blay, of Gladstone Funeral Services. The Casket was covered with a Union Jack and a wreath of poppies was placed on it by Mr. Hill. Members of the Gladstone Sub-branch conveyed it from the Townsville train to the Monto train, pall-bearers being: Messrs K. Corr, D. Schneider, J. Therkelsen, A. Hill and T. Blay.

### Held in Highest Esteem

On arrival at Monto the remains were met by Mr. J. C. Winn, who had charge of arrangements for the funeral, and were taken to Mulgildie and placed in the School of Arts there. At 11 a.m. Rev. Arnold Bruce conducted a funeral service in the hall and the long cortege to the ceremony testified to the esteem in which the deceased gentleman and his family are held by a wide circle of friends.

Pall-bearers at the graveside were: Messrs J. McLurkin, J. Booth, W. Connell snr., L. Andrews, Eric Power and Stan Mitchell, and the Casket, covered with floral tributes, was conveyed on Mr. L. Avis 30-cwt. truck. The president of the Monto sub-branch of the R.S.S.A.I.L.A., Mr. S. F. Richards, read the branch's funeral service, and Rev. Bruce officiated. The "Last Post" and "Reveille" were sounded over the Memorial Club Room's Broadcasting Equipment by Mr. D. Marshall.

The flag was flown at half mast on the flag pole at the Memorial Club from the time word was received of the tragedy until after the funeral had taken place, a period of six days, as a token of respect to the young soldier, who had fought with the 2/15 Australian Infantry Battalion, 9th Australian Division, at Tobruk and at El Alamein. At the time of his death he was a civilian employed by the R.A.A.F. at No. 8 R.A.A.F. Stores Depot, Macrossan, as a storeman.

### His Family and Relatives

The late Mr. Flewell-Smith was the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Flewell-Smith, of Redcliffe, and his mother, together with his widow (nee Miss Mabel Lewis), two small sons, his sister (Mrs. R. Burns, Biloela), and two brothers (Messrs Doug and Keith), were chief mourners and besides these he is survived by his father, and two brothers, Messrs Alan and Stan. One brother, Clive, died as a prisoner of war in Malaya.

NED'S BURIED AT THE MULGILDIE CEMETERY, the only one of those killed in the Macrossan smash not buried at Charters Towers. We put him on the train and brought him back to be near where we first met. I felt that I wouldn't be able to go and visit him anymore if he was buried in Charters Towers, being so far from where I'd be living. So we had the funeral at the little hall at Mulgildie, and the burial down the way. And I'll be buried next to him. I've got my plot reserved. We buried Ned and I went to the shire office some time later and paid 10 shillings and reserved it.

Left: Cutting from *The Central Telegraph*.

The Mrs R. Burns mentioned in the last paragraph refers to Marj Burns, Ned's sister.  
[Dawn, NF05f, September 1948]

Right: Cutting from *The Central Telegraph*.

[Dawn, NF05d, September 1948]

Below: Receipt issued to Dawn for reservation of her burial plot next to Ned.  
[Dawn, DF82, 21/2/1949]



SHIRE OF MONTO. No 11757

Monto, 21-2-1949

Received by Cash from Mrs. E. J. Flewell-Smith

the sum of ..... pounds ..... shillings

and ..... pence, being Reserve Cemetery Site Mulgildie

£ - 10: 0

E. J. Burnes  
Shire Clerk.

A. H. TUCKER, Govt. Printer, Brisbane.





**Above:** Ned's grave (second from right) at the Mulgildie cemetery.  
Dawn's reserved plot is on the left of Ned's.  
[Guy Burns, GK89a, 3/8/2003]

**Below:** Dawn sitting beside Ned's grave.  
[Guy Burns, GK89c, 3/8/2003]





# If I Had To Choose



PEOPLE WONDER WHAT THE HELL I'm packing up for and moving house at 80 years of age. They must think I'm mad. But I want to go, see. I've got friends here in Coolum, but I've got just as many friends at Monto. And I can go to the cemetery and see Ned if I want to. I want to feel closer to him. And I'll be buried beside him. To me this move means a lot.

I'm going back to where Ned and I began; going back to the beginning before I reach the end. Monto is where I met him and that's where my boys were born. I'll be buried there and I've always intended to be. I've had a plot next to Ned's grave all the time right from when he was buried. It's always been there and the council have always kept it. I paid 10 shillings and they have never asked me for any more.

Ned was always in my heart.  
Even though I remarried twice,  
(it was difficult to lose three husbands)  
and even though I loved the other two,  
I made sure they knew,  
whether I was Mrs Wheelbarrow,  
that I was to be buried next to Ned.

I always intended to be buried next to him as a Flewell-Smith. Yes, I was Mrs Horan, Mrs Fuller... I was a Lewis, Flewell-Smith, Horan, Flewell-Smith, Fuller, and now Flewell-Smith again. And I'm to be buried as Ned's wife.

I've never forgotten Ned.  
Never will.  
He's always there, a part of my heart.  
That's why I'm going back to Monto.  
That's where I want to be.

NED'S LETTERS THAT YOU'RE COPYING, they mean everything. All through my life, they... that's why I kept them. I'd sit and read them and cry. Huh!

In my life Ned was the main person. I might have married someone else and loved them in my way, but Ned was my main person, always.

I suppose the letters are so important because I loved him. We loved one another and we never had much time together. And during the time we did have together we thought we'd have plenty of years to talk. Yet he was killed so soon after the war that we never had any...

IF I HAD TO CHOOSE between the letters and the photos... Oh, I think the letters. If someone made me choose between burning the letters or the photos, I'd say burn the photos. I wouldn't destroy the letters. That special person has written them. They've used that piece of paper and they've written on it. Not only the words that are on it, but the paper was theirs too, y'know. The paper that the letters are written on is important. The paper's old and they've used a pen and taken their time and they've done it and expressed themselves. Ned sent that specially to me. That's right... that's right. I could never throw them away.

I've sometimes thought I'd like them buried with me. That was one idea I had. But then a friend said it wouldn't be fair to the boys. Yet somehow I still feel that if they were buried with me I'd die knowing that the letters were not wasted. They'd be forever with someone who treasured them.



**Opposite:** Dawn at the 2001 world reunion  
for the Rats of Tobruk, Brisbane.  
[Dawn, DF23]





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Nadzab, 16th September, 1943.  
 Inserted by 2/25th Aust. Inf. Bn.  
**FLEWELL-SMITH**.—In loving mem-  
 ory of Edgar (Ned) QX3199, 2/15,  
 accidentally killed, Charters Towers,  
 16/9/43.  
 Always in our thoughts.  
 For we who love you never for-  
 get.  
 Dad, Mum, Brothers, Sister, Mar-  
 jorie Burns, Dawn, Sons, Deric and  
 Clive.  
 —In loving memory of

**DEATHS**  
**FLEWELL-SMITH**.—On Sept. 16 at  
 Charters Towers (accident), Edgar  
 John (Ned), youngest Son of Mr.  
 & Mrs. W. Flewell-Smith, Brother  
 of Douglas, Stanley, Allan, Keith,  
 Marjorie (Mrs. M. Burns), Clive  
 (Dec), Husband of Dawn, Father of  
 Deric & Clive. Sadly missed.  
**LADDER**.—On Oct. 6th till beloved

**FLEWELL-SMITH**.—In loving memory  
 of Spr. Clive, QX10858, 2/11 "Gull"  
 Force, died P.O.W. Ambon 9/6/45, also  
 Pte. Edgar (Ned) QX3199, 2/15 D Coy.  
 accidentally killed Charters Towers  
 16/9/43.  
 Loved and remembered always by their  
 loving family.

**ROLL OF HONOUR**  
**FLEWELL-SMITH**.—Clive B., on June  
 9th, 1945, at Ammi, POW, Son of  
 Mr and Mrs W. W. Flewell-Smith,  
 Brisbane, Brother of Douglas, Stan-  
 ley, Warwick; Keith, Allan, Wondal;  
 Marjorie (Mrs M. Burns), Clermont;  
 Ned, Monto.



Spr. Clive B.  
 Flewell - Smith,  
 son of Mr. and  
 Mrs. W. W.  
 Flewell - Smith  
 Lambert Road,  
 Kangaroo Point  
 late of Yeronga.

Inserted by his Sister, Sally.  
**FLEWELL-SMITH**.—In loving memory of  
 our dear Son & Brother, Spr. Clive B.  
 Flewell-Smith, 2/11 Field Coy., R.A.E.,  
 Gull Force, enlisted Field Coy., R.A.E.,  
 P.O.W. Force, Camp Ambon, Wondal, died in  
 His voice keeps on whispering  
 Be brave, loyal, & true.  
 At the end of the lane of shadows  
 I will be waiting for you  
**HARPHAM**.—In loving memory of Lieut.





**Right:** Ned's enlistment photo.  
[Ned, NF07, Monday, 20 May 1940]





This page won't be printed. The last signature ends on page 220 opposite. The book proper goes from page 1 to 220. The book can be broken into these signatures: (6 x 32) + (1 x 28).

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JUST AT PRESENT I'm feeling pretty rotten.

I'm one of the LOB (left out of battle) personnel  
and the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life  
was to leave the boys  
and come back here while they went to have a slap at Jerry.

I couldn't say goodbye to any of the lads.

I just walked away and left them.

A couple of the lads started to go round  
and shake hands before they left  
but before they had gone far  
they were nearer to real tears than I've ever seen in a man.

There's quite a few of my coppers detailed as LOB  
and amongst them are some of the best men this battalion has.  
We hated like hell to leave but we didn't have a say in the matter.  
The only thing I've wanted in this show  
was to take my old section into a decent scrap  
and if I had to get skittled in doing so – well and good.

But now...

well, I'll see action  
but with what section I don't know.

And even if I get back to my old section  
some faces will have gone forever  
and I just can't forget that I won't be there to help them.

A chap feels as if he's run out on them  
and can't ever look them in the eyes again.

He feels he doesn't want to see them again because of that.

I suppose you think I'm crazy, Darling.

Well, I might be  
but it affects one like that  
after being together with your coppers for so long.

*NED, 11 July 1942*



